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Israel and the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement

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The Israeli Islamic Movement’s Northern Branch and its leader Sheikh Ra’id Salah pose a complex and multi-dimensional challenge for the State of Israel: political, national, socioeconomic and religious. Its most prominent manifestation is the movement’s striving for separatism and open defiance of Israel’s Jewish character. The government has sought—with limited success—to draw ‘red lines’ for the movement and its leaders and its occasional threats of harsher measures, including outlawing the movement, have failed to achieve the desired result.

Keywords: Israel; Islamic movements; Ra’id Salah; Israeli Arabs; Hamas

The Islamic Movement in Israel was established in the second half of the 1970s as a religious, political and social movement operating under the slogan ‘al-Islam hu al-hal’ (Islam is the solution). It did not differ from other Islamist groups that arose at the time, some of which used militant means to achieve their goals. In Israel the movement focused mainly on socio-religious activities, or Da’wa, after a stillborn short-term military experience in the late 1970s. During the 1980s the movement started to take part in the municipal politics of Israel, gaining strength in municipal elections.

When in 1996 the movement decided to participate for the first time in Knesset elections it split into two branches – the Northern and the Southern. The disagreement surrounding its participation in secular politics (which characterizes parallel Islamist movements in the Middle East) was unique in Israel due to the state’s Jewish character. The decision of the Northern Branch, headed by the charismatic Sheikh Ra’id Salah, not to participate in the Knesset elections was interpreted as a political challenge against the Israeli state, but the motive was predominantly religious. Salah believed that participating in the national elections, which to his opinion represents ‘a way of legislation which contrasts what Allah has commanded’, meant de facto recognition of sovereignty and laws that were non-Islamic, hence a renunciation of the principle that ‘Islam is the solution’.

Nonetheless, the attempt to differentiate between a political challenge and a religious one is doomed to fail with regard to Islam. Contrary to Christianity, Islam is a political religion that does not differentiate between religion and

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state, between sacred and profane. This is why every Islamist movement is so complex. This complexity is magnified in Israel by the country’s Jewish nature as well as the prolonged national-religious conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, to whom the Arabs in Israel feel a kinship – historic, ethnic and religious. This complexity creates a significant challenge for the secular Arab regimes and Israel.

**The challenge**

The challenge posed by the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement to the State of Israel is a comprehensive one – political, national, socioeconomic and religious, or in one word – Islamic. Islam is the impetus of the movement’s activity and its rules (as interpreted by the Northern Branch’s leaders) contradict the character of the state in which the movement operates.

**Da’wa infrastructure inside Israel**

Like other Islamist movements, the Israeli one makes great efforts to establish a social Da’wa infrastructure which constitutes a partial alternative to the services offered by the state or by some secular associations operating in the country’s Arab population. The beginning of the Islamic Movement is rooted in the Da’wa activity of Sheikh Abdullah Nimer Darwish from the second half of the 1970s, in his village of Kafr Qassem, spreading through the main regions where the Israeli Muslim-Arab population resides. The 1996 split into the two branches divided the movement’s Daw’ah infrastructure; the social organizations in the Galilee and the northern Triangle, especially in the city of Umm al-Fahm, fell under the control of the Northern Branch.

The Da’wa infrastructure of the Islamic Movement is involved in every aspect of life, including health, education, welfare and religious services. The movement runs clinics in many villages which provide general and expert medical services as well as dentistry. Some of the clinics provide emergency night services, while others offer their own medical insurance. In some villages the Islamic clinics are the only ones, while in others they compete with the national health provision services.³

Even greater attention is given to education. The movement’s education system includes kindergartens, vocational courses, enrichment classes, summer camps, and libraries.⁴ Its curriculum combines the Arab-nationalist component (and to a large extent the Palestinian narrative) with religious aspects while encouraging scholastic excellence. In 2003 it was reported that the movement had educational institutions in 86% of the Arab villages.⁵ The movement also established educational institutions in religious and ethnic heterogeneous settlements, as well as in mixed Jewish–Arab cities, to counteract the non-Muslim and secular surroundings. It is also worth mentioning the Northern Branch’s sport activities, which include an Islamic soccer league, separate from the Israeli
league (in which numerous Arab teams take part) and from the Southern Branch’s league.6

In the field of religious services, the Islamic Movement builds and renovates mosques which are used not just for prayers and religious rituals but for many of its social–educational activities. In some of the mosques Islamist books and cassettes as well as textbooks and other school materials are sold at affordable prices. Religious preaching is held outside the mosques, including at home gatherings. The movement also runs voluntary work camps, which renovate mosques and other religious sites, such as Islamic cemeteries, as well as villages’ general infrastructures (such as roads and schools).7

Many charitable activities are run by the movement, including monetary and material assistance for people in need.8 The Islamist character of the movement’s services, as well as their voluntary nature and affordable prices, have won the Northern Branch and its leader prestige and vast public support. This way the movement succeeds in achieving one of its most important goals – bringing people closer to Islam, as well as fulfilling its socioeconomic commandments of social solidarity and justice. But according to the comprehensive nature of Islam and the unique situation of the Arabs in Israel, these Da’wa activities are also derived from political and national goals and a wish to set themselves apart from the Israeli-Jewish culture.

Several times over the past few years Sheikh Salah has revealed his ambitious plan to establish an ‘independent community’ (al-mujtama al-asami) – a multi-stage and long-term project that will include the establishment of independent institutions under an umbrella organization and concern every aspect of life (including future factories, commercial companies, dairy farms, agricultural companies, independent local banks, hospitals, schools for all ages etc.). The project’s primary objective is to establish a society that will be able to organize – as it sees fit – its institutions and the Arab citizens’ daily life independent of the Israeli establishment. Salah believes that this is the only way in which

the Islamic idea will succeed in the circumstances of a governed minority in the Palestinian interior [meaning Israel]; this project is a mechanism for protection from attempts at westernization, globalization and destruction of Islamic values and tradition in Israel; the project has potential for revitalization, enthusiasm and survivability of the Islamic norms.9

 Nonetheless, the implementation of Salah’s vision may face many obstacles, including government acts against the social institutions of the Northern Branch and their financial mechanisms. The most probable reason behind these acts is the state’s will to preserve its Jewish character and prevent socioeconomic separatism on religious and national grounds. Another reason for Israel’s acts, an overt one, is the connections between the Northern Branch’s social institutions and Hamas charity committees (but not its military or political branches) in the West Bank and Gaza and their financial resources abroad.
The Islamic movement in Israel, the Palestinians in the Territories and Hamas

There are religious, national and political similarities between the two foremost Islamist movements on both sides of the 1967 ‘Green Line’ – Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza and the Northern Branch. They are both Palestinian offshoots of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement, established already in the 1928. The geopolitical circumstances of the 1948 and 1967 wars led them in different directions, but their ideological and historic base is identical.

For this reason it is hardly surprising that the Northern Branch’s leaders frequently express their support for the Palestinians in the territories and emphasize the Palestinian component of their identity. Sheikh Salah expressed this, for example, in a 2007 interview in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* (while consistently avoiding – as a symbolic act of separatism – interviews with Israeli Hebrew-speaking media):

> The Islamic Movement was established in the mid-1970s and has been concerned with preserving the identity of its followers and with integrating their Islamic, Arab, and Palestinian dimensions. At the same time the movement seeks, through its members and institutions, to protect our existence on our land, defend our rights and sacred sites, and assume our legitimate role in supporting the Palestinian people … Currently, the movement … endeavors to play a positive role with respect to Palestinian society in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip … Our relations with other parties are transparent and we have no secret dealings to conceal. This applies to our relations … with Palestinian society as a whole in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, of which Hamas is a part.

The Northern Branch’s connections with Hamas in particular and the Palestinians in general focus on declared political support (contrary to the Southern Branch Salah rejected the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO) and extending humanitarian assistance to the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including families of *Shahids* (martyrs in Hamas’ terminology) and prisoners. For this cause the Northern Islamic Movement established a special institution named the Islamic Committee of Mercy which had a branch in the Israeli town of Umm al-Fahm.

The Northern Branch’s verbal and humanitarian support of the Palestinians, compounded by its profound criticism of Israeli policy, reached its peak with Salah’s participation in the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla to Gaza, organized by the IHH Turkish Islamic aid organization in May 2010 in order to break the Israeli naval blockade of Gaza, in operation since Hamas took control of the strip in June 2007. The killing of nine activists and the wounding of several others, including Salah, in the IDF’s takeover of the ship created an anti-Israel outcry, with the sheikh claiming that Israel tried to kill him.

In addition to its political and humanitarian support, the Islamic Movement was alleged to have helped Hamas commit terrorist attacks inside Israel. In fact, even though activists identified with the movement were involved in terrorist attacks, they probably acted as individuals and were not directed by the movement. The Northern Branch’s leaders have also avoided expressing...
support for Hamas terrorist attacks, but also avoided blatantly condemning them.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Religious and nationalist incitement}

Another issue over which the Northern Branch and its leaders challenge Israel is their activity concerning Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque, including incitement, both orally and between the lines of the Northern Branch’s weekly journal, \textit{Sawt al-Haqq wa-l-Hurriya} (Voice of Truth and Freedom).\textsuperscript{15}

As part of the Northern Branch’s \textit{Da’wa} activity the movement calls for Muslims to reclaim all \textit{Waqf} (the Islamic endowment) assets.\textsuperscript{16} The movement founded a national Islamist committee whose goal is to map \textit{Waqf} assets, holy places and cemeteries that belonged to the Muslim community before the state of Israel was born and to represent the findings (backed up with maps and documents) to the UN and the international community.\textsuperscript{17} The heads of the movement claim that the Israeli Ministry of Religious Services failed to maintain the Islamic holy places.

The struggle over freeing the Islamic lands and real estate and re-appropriating them is part of the Islamist activity for strengthening Israeli Arabs’ historical and cultural heritage. In addition to their desire to preserve these sites and prevent their damage, their goal is to show the existence of a Palestinian culture in Israel through revitalizing the activity in every possible site and returning the Arab population to the settlements they left in the past. This activity is organized by ‘The al-Aqsa Institution for building the Islamic holy sites’ headed by Sheikh Salah.\textsuperscript{18}

The Northern Branch dedicates special attention to ‘protecting’ the al-Aqsa mosque. Sheikh Salah continuously warns, through speeches and writings, of the supposed Israeli danger to the holy mosque. He also asks Muslims worldwide and in Israel to give moral support and monetary assistance to ‘save’ the mosque from ‘Israeli occupation’. Every year the movement organizes the ‘al-Aqsa in Danger Festival’ in Umm al-Fahm, which aims at raising awareness of the dangers alleged to be posed by Israel to this holy site.\textsuperscript{19} In a rare act of cooperation the two branches organize the Flags and Torches Journey, a religious project aimed at encouraging Muslims to visit al-Aqsa throughout the year.\textsuperscript{20}

Sheikh Salah’s charismatic personality excites the masses on all issues regarding Jerusalem and other religious and national-political matters. The Or Commission, investigating the October 2000 clashes between the Israeli police and the country’s Arab citizens, apparently found Sheikh Salah, as head of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement, Umm al-Fahm mayor, and a public persona, responsible in the period prior to the October 2000 events, including in 1998–2000, for the transmission of repeated messages encouraging the use of violence and the threat of violence as a means of achieving the goals of Israel’s Arab sector. These messages related also to the goal of freeing the al-Aqsa mosque. In addition, it was proven that he held mass assemblies and used propaganda to incite the public and create a tense atmosphere regarding this
sensitive issue ... and he was responsible ... for the transmission of messages that negated the legitimacy of the existence of the State of Israel and presented the state as an enemy. In all of these, he had a substantial contribution to provoking tempers and contributing to the violent and widespread outbursts that took place in the Arab sector at the beginning of October 2000.21

State responses
As shown above, the Islamic Movement’s Northern Branch and its leader create a complex and multi-dimensional challenge to the State of Israel. How does the state respond to this challenge in the sphere of legal enforcement and politics? And how does the country’s Jewish population relate to this challenge and to the government’s actions?

The legal and law-enforcement system
Israel reacted firmly to the Islamic Movement soon after its birth in the late 1970s. The movement attempted at the time to establish a semi-military arm, named Usrat al-Jihad (Family of Jihad) and comprising a few dozen members (including Sheikh Salah). This attempt ended shortly after it began with the imprisonment of the activists (including Sheikh Abdullah Nimer Darwish, sentenced to three years in prison).22

After his release from jail Sheikh Darwish took a new–old approach to the movement: no more violent confrontations with the authorities but winning the hearts and minds of the believers through education, persuasion, guidance and relieving societal stresses.23 The authorities viewed these activities positively, and while stopping short of supporting them, did not interfere either. In the words of former Minister of Interior Arie Der’i, ‘Live and let live’.24

In the religious arena the Israeli authorities have sought to maintain influence on the Muslim religious establishment, even preventing the movement’s activists from being appointed to formal positions (such as Imams in mosques under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs). These efforts, however, seem to have ebbed over the past decade resulting in the Islamic Movement’s virtual autonomy.

The rise of the Movement’s Northern Branch from 1996 onward has made it easier for Israel to institute more aggressive action against the movement. Even before its split, Salah and his supporters were considered more extreme than the other movements’ activists. The Southern Branch’s participation in the national elections has given it a seal of approval while the separatism of the Northern Branch and its defiance raised concern among the law-enforcement authorities, and in particular its ties with Hamas.

As early as 1996 the Israeli security agencies shut down the Umm al-Fahm branch of the Movement’s Islamic Committee of Mercy because of its support for families of imprisoned terrorists and Shahids – an activity financed by Hamas, among others. Soon thereafter the committee reopened under a new...
name – the Humanitarian Rescue Committee for the Support of Orphans and People in Need – with the authorities’ acquiescence (following the committee’s promise to return to the straight and narrow). However, the committee was shut down again on May 2003 as part of the authorities’ acts against the Northern Branch’s leaders and institutions, charged with receiving money from Hamas’ funds abroad for the Northern Branch’s social projects inside Israel, as well as for Hamas’ similar initiatives in the territories.

According to the indictment against five of the movement’s leaders, including Salah, they:

sustained routine connections with the activists of Interpal [Hamas’ main UK fund], al-Aqsa fund [a Germany-centred Hamas fund], the Union of Good, and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth [WAMY] in order to assist these organizations in delivering money to the bank accounts of the institution [the Humanitarian Rescue Committee] in Israel for social purposes and to the Territories. The accused persons delivered some of the monies either by currency or goods to prisoners who committed crimes against the state’s national security in order to assist them in jail and to cheer them up. To finance different projects inside Israel [such as] preserving holy sites and buying real estates, thereby advancing the goals of the movement and the institution.

In addition, the original indictment included serious offences against the state’s national security, including contact with an Iranian agent. These offences were dismissed due to the plea bargain that was eventually negotiated, with Salah and his chieftains admitting to the above economic–security offences and sentenced to a period of imprisonment that almost matched the time they had already been held in custody during their trial.

Widely covered by the media, the arrest and trial were strongly criticized by the Israeli Arabs in general and the Islamic Movement in particular, whose activists claimed political oppression by the authorities. As Salah claimed a few years later:

Officially I was charged under the antiterrorism laws because our organization collected money for charities in the occupied territories, but to this day I don’t know the real reasons for my arrest and imprisonment. Maybe it had something to do with our role in thwarting Israel’s schemes against the al-Aqsa Mosque through our rehabilitation and restoration works. Another factor might have been our contacts (though open and legal) with Islamic and Arab institutions in implementing projects critical to the life of our community inside the 1948 borders. There was also our support – again entirely open – for our people in the occupied territories under siege by providing relief and medicine and equipment for hospitals and so on. Or maybe it was our initiative to survey all the Awqaf holdings and the various Islamic and Christian sacred sites.

The arrest and the trial did not sever the Northern Branch’s ties with Hamas’ charity committees. Thus, for example, in August 2008 the police and the General Security Service (GSS, or shabak) shut down the Umm al-Fahm offices of the al-Aqsa Institution coordinating the movement’s struggle on the issues of Jerusalem and the Islamic Waqf following its declaration as ‘an unlawful
entity in Israel’ by a Minister of Defence decree due to its connections to Hamas’ social institutions in East Jerusalem – just a few days after the institution organized the 13th ‘al-Aqsa in Danger’ festival where tens of thousands of people protested against the supposed danger posed by Israel to the mosque.29

In addition to the Northern Branch’s institutions, its leader is also closely watched by the authorities and often appears in court. For example, in 2002 the Ministry of Interior issued a six-month decree forbidding Salah to leave the country. He appealed to the Supreme Court, claiming that his right to perform a religious ritual (the pilgrimage to the city of Mecca – the Hajj) had been violated, but his appeal was rejected on the basis of a GSS confidential report, shown only to the judges, which expressed concern that Salah ‘may severely harm the state’s national security’.30

Salah’s freedom of movement inside the country was also restricted on many occasions. Thus, the chief of the IDF’s Home Front Command issued on December 2009 a decree prohibiting his entrance to Jerusalem for a period of three weeks ‘for reasons of national security, public security and the maintenance of public order’ (again, based on confidential information presented by the security services).31 And in January 2010 Salah was sentenced to nine months in prison for spitting in a police officer’s face during the Islamic Movement’s demonstration near the Temple Mount (February 2007).32

While reacting to Salah’s actions, the law enforcement authorities found it more difficult to respond to his public appearances, which often involved outright incitement. Israel usually avoids putting religious and/or nationalist inciting radicals on trial (an act which requires, due to its political sensitivity, the approval of the Attorney General).33 As an alternative, the censorship used to invalidate problematic articles in Sawa’t al-Haqq wal-Hurriya and in 2002 the Minister of Interior issued a decree ordering the weekly’s shutdown, though the decree was not enforced.34

The limited impact and effectiveness of Israel’s acts against institutions and personalities associated with the Northern Branch drove the security services to consider its outlawing, an act rife with far-reaching consequences. In addition, a number of Knesset members have tried over the years to promote this initiative and/or others in order to limit the Northern Branch’s activity.35

The Knesset and the government

Initiatives to outlaw the Islamic Movement and the Northern Branch have been raised since the early 1990s, especially after terrorist activities involving Israeli Arabs identified with the Islamic Movement (but without proven direction by the movement). Following such activities, in 1999 the National Security Cabinet decided on several measures to supervise the Northern Branch’s leaders and institutions, but these measures were just a limited version of those suggested by the security services.36
The October 2000 events and the trial of the movement’s leaders have generated new initiatives by some Knesset members. For example, in July 2007 Likud MK Israel Katz submitted a proposal for a law declaring the Northern Branch ‘an unlawful association’ because ‘it had consistently and systematically used the Israeli democracy to undermine it from the inside’. One of the reasons for the unanimous decline of his proposal was the government’s claim that this was an issue for the legal system rather than the Knesset.37

Other bills and proposals raised throughout the years involve restricting construction projects by the Islamic Movement and the Waqf on Temple Mount,38 as well as supervising the educational system of the Arab sector for fear of the Movement’s penetration into schools. This ‘dangerous phenomenon’, as defined by a few MKs, was repeatedly discussed by the Knesset’s Education Committee in 2010 under the title ‘the limits of teachers’ political freedom of expression’. The Minister of Education said in one of the meetings that he ‘sees the infiltration of the Islamic Movement into the education system, kindergartens more so than schools, as a negative phenomenon’.39

It should be noted that as a remnant of the military regime to which the Israeli Arabs were subjected during the state’s first two decades, the GSS probably still supervises the appointment of school principals in the Arab sector. As the former Deputy Minister of Public Security, Gideon Ezra (who served before as the deputy head of the GSS), said:

We must not let Arab educators who are members of the Islamic Movement or belong to Bnei Hakfar Movement achieve teaching positions in Arab schools. Even if the Islamic Movement, for example, is a lawful movement, it does not believe in coexistence between Jews and Arabs. The State of Israel should not finance the salaries of educators who do not teach the pupils loyalty to the state. Unfortunately we have not yet reached a situation in which Arab educators can be nominated just for pedagogical considerations.41

The Israel Beitenu party headed by Avigdor Liberman (nominated in March 2009 as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Netanyahu government) has surpassed all others by promoting the idea of territory and population exchanges with the prospective Palestinian state as part of a bilateral peace agreement, placing some Israeli Arab localities along the Green Line under Palestinian sovereignty (without moving any residents from their homes) in return for Israel’s annexation of the main settlement blocs in the West Bank. A corollary of this proposed plan, which has become a goal unto itself, is the demand that the Israeli Arabs pledge their allegiance to the state.42

While the Israel Beitenu plan does not explicitly refer to the Islamic Movement, the Northern Branch sees itself as its main target both because of repeated expressions by the party’s leaders against the movement and because the border town of Umm al-Fahm, the movement’s foremost power base, is the heart of the plan.43

A few other right-wing parties joined Israel Beitenu in casting doubt about the loyalty of the Arab sector in Israel, with emphasis on the Islamist trend. Knesset
member Michael Ben-Ari even warned in 2010 that the ‘Israeli Arabs carry out a silent conquest’:

Ra‘id Salah’s Islamist Movement is not different from Bin Laden’s way. They are just waiting for a window of opportunity, for the proper timing, to return Acre and Safed – as well as other places – to the house of Islam.44

Public opinion

Jewish public opinion has been divided over the issue of the Israeli Arabs and the Islamist trend. In recent years a new radical approach has emerged, manifested inter alia by the growing popularity of Israel Beitenu, which won 15 mandates in the 2009 elections compared with 11 in the 2006 elections. There have also been demonstrations against renting apartments to Arabs in several cities, and public opinion polls show vast support for outlawing the Islamic Movement45 as well as resistance to including Arab ministers in government and having Israeli Arabs share decisions on crucial state issues.46

Conclusions

Many democracies worldwide deliberate the so-called ‘democratic dilemma’: to what extent should a democracy allow its citizens, including those bent on its subversion, full freedom of activity, which in fact may hasten its end, and to what extent should a democracy fight the non-democratic forces in its midst.

Any analysis of Israel’s reaction to the complex and comprehensive challenge of the Islamic Movement’s Northern Branch must differentiate between policy-determining factors (security and law enforcement authorities, the government and to a limited extent the Knesset) and those which indirectly affect the policy (extremist right-wing parties, academic researchers, public opinion and the court system). Fluctuating between limited inclusion and marginalization, this ‘policy’ has enabled ‘non-welcome factors’ (as the Northern Branch is perceived by the authorities) a certain degree of freedom and socio-political unionization, so long as it did not interfere with the basic configuration of state institutions. When it did, Israel’s policy reverted to marginalization, including pressure by the political and legal system against the ‘rebellious factors’.

Pressure by extreme right-wing factors for more drastic measures against the Northern Branch, including its outlawing, has thus far come to naught as the Israeli authorities would rather maintain a delicate ‘balance of deterrence’ with the Northern Branch, constantly relaying to its leaders their vaguely defined ‘red lines’, mainly interpreted as purely security in nature. In the words of Kamal Hatib, Salah’s deputy:

We are fully aware of the red lines and do not intend to cross them. We have no interest in involving the Palestinian citizens in the ‘interior’ [the Israeli Arabs] in the struggle in the occupied territories, but it is our obligation to deliver humanitarian assistance to orphans and people in need. This is our ultimate religious and national duty.47
What Israel views as extremism (e.g. Salah’s continuous provocations and anti-state defiance) is seen by the Northern Branch leaders and members as defence of Islam against the Jewish/Israeli threat. In their eyes this is a clash of cultures whose unequal footing and basic opening conditions may threaten their Islamic identity, a local manifestation of Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*, albeit a temporarily less violent one. Indeed, the Branch’s foremost challenge is not so much a security threat as an act of separatism. The movement shows its defiance of the state and its institutions by boycotting the national elections, establishing its own socio-economic infrastructure, and mounting extreme anti-Israel verbal attacks and political activities. This defiance is further exacerbated by the movement’s ideological and humanitarian connections to Islamist groups in the West Bank and Gaza, first and foremost Hamas.

This is not to say the Northern Branch is fully oblivious to the desire of most Israeli Arabs for greater social equality and integration within Israeli society, as indicated by its continuous contact with the state institutions at the municipal level, including state funding for its local activities. And therein precisely lies the potential ‘formula’ for preventing another deterioration between the state and the Northern Branch. Although this local interaction may not eliminate the ‘clash of civilizations’ between the Jewish state and the Islamist group, it might reduce its intensity by capitalizing on the yearning of most Israeli Arabs not only for separatism but also for Israelization [or integration]. This trend may be further facilitated by greater official openness to autonomous non-territorial rights for Israeli Arabs in managing various aspects of life – from religious rituals and matrimonial law, via education, language and culture, to health, welfare and maybe even civil service. Such an arrangement is likely to weaken those seeking to challenge the state’s Jewish character, first and foremost the Northern Branch.

**Notes on contributor**

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**Notes**

1. The titles ‘Northern Branch’ and ‘Southern Branch’ express their two areas of influence: the northern part of the Triangle (a concentration of Israeli Arab towns and villages adjacent to the Green Line in the eastern Sharon plain among the Samarian foothills), especially the city of Umm al-Fahm, as well as the Galilee area, on the one hand; the Negev region and the Southern part of the Triangle, especially the village of Kafr Qassem, on the other.
3. Ofer Beeri, “The Islamic Fellowship in the Lower Galilee: Geographical Aspects of Socio-Religious Activities” [in Hebrew] (MA diss., University of Haifa, 1997), 64–5. According to the Israeli National Medical Insurance law, every Israeli citizen must be registered in one of the four Israeli health maintenance organizations (Kupot Holim), none of which are religious in character.
4. The movement has less control over elementary and post-primary education, which is state-operated. The complementary system developed by the Islamic Movement includes assistance to weak students in mathematics and English, as well as computer, internet, Qur’an and Hadith (the Islamic oral law) lessons and preparation for the matriculation examinations. These activities are usually held in community centres and mosques.


6. Due to its Islamist nature, the league constitutes a moral alternative to the Israeli football league. Its religious character is reflected in different ways: games are opened and ended in a joint call of the two rival teams at the centre of the field – ‘Allahhu Akbar’ – and sometimes group prayer is held before the game or at half time; the players are dressed in long trousers, even during hot summer days; the flags of the fans around the field are decorated with Islamic motives; and the Discipline Regulations are extremely strict and entirely forbid insulting and cursing the rival players. See Raed A. Zuabi, “The Prize for the Winners: A Visit to Macca,” Haaretz, May 23, 2004.


8. Similar (and separate) activities are run also by the Southern Branch of the movement, for example via the Islamic Committee for Saving the Orphans and the Needy – http://www.igatha.com.


11. Salah’s support of Palestinian prisoners in Israel was reflected in his speech at an April 2010 rally in Umm al-Fahm, in which he said: ‘The prisoners of freedom, you are our dawn. Today we stand together – associations, organizations, institutions and different political views – for your release’. Sawt al-Haqq wa-l-Hurriya, April 28, 2000.


13. A prominent terrorist attack of this kind was the ‘pitchforks night’ attack of February 1992 – before the split of the Islamic Movement – by four Israeli Arabs identified with the movement, though it was never proven that they were acting on its behalf. The four, residents of Um al-Fahen, invaded a recruits’ military base and brutally murdered three soldiers using axes and pitchforks.


15. The journal was first published in 1989 after its predecessor, al-Sirat, was closed down by the authorities. After the 1996 split of the Islamic Movement it identified with the Northern Branch. In response, the Southern Branch began publishing (in 1999) the weekly al-Mithak.

16. The Islamic Movement’s struggle over Waqf peaked in December 1997, a few days before the Christmas celebrations and the beginning of the Ramadan Muslim holy month, when activists took over the Church of the Annunciation’s square in
Nazareth, which was planned to be renovated and prepared for the festivities of the year 2000 and the Pope’s visit to the city. The Muslims declared the site a Waqf asset, began raising a big mosque-shaped tent and announced their plan to build a permanent building with an 86-metre minaret which would overshadow the church. The incident, which only came to an end after several years, caused a confrontation between Israel, the Islamic Movement and the Christian world (involving even the Vatican).


18. The institution’s website (http://www.islamic-aqsa.com) provides many details on its different activities.


21. Israel, The Official Commission for the Investigation of the Clashes between the Security Forces and Israeli Citizens on October 2000 (The “Or Commission”), A Report [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Or Commission, September 2003): II: 643. In addition Salah was found by the commission to be responsible ‘for the transmission of messages regarding an allegedly planned massacre at Al Aqsa on 29 September 2000. He was also responsible for comments praising the outbreak of serious and widespread violence that occurred in the Arab sector at the beginning of 2000, before the events ended’. At the same time, the commission did not decide that the uprising was organized by the Islamic Movement or any other factor. This conclusion fits the assessment of the General Security Service a few days after the events began, according to which ‘there is no element directing the activity in the Arab sector. The anger burst out after the killing in the Temple Mount [due to the clashes occurred there after Ariel Sharon, opposition’s leader then, visited the site] and turned into a complete release of steam, on the grounds of continuous deprivation’. See Amos Har’el, “GSS: The Islamic Movement did not Organize the Clashes,” Haaretz, October 5, 2000.


23. Ibrahim Sarsur, one of the movement’s leaders, mentioned after years that the state’s decisive reaction taught them a lesson: not to deviate from the ‘social work, from the guideline which should lead Islamic movements all along the way’, and that there was a need ‘to differentiate between our legitimate right to protest against Israel’s policy and between acts that are considered an activity against the existence of the State of Israel in the military-security arena’. See Ibrahim Sarsur, “The Islamic Movement and the State,” in Dilemmas in Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel, ed. Yitzhak Reiter [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2005), 244.


26. The Union of Good is an umbrella organization uniting dozens of Islamic charities worldwide – including Hamas’ funds in Europe and charities in the Persian Gulf which assist also Hamas (such as WAMY – http://www.wamy.org) – in order to help the Palestinian in the territories.
27. Website of The Israel Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing Prohibition Authority (affiliated to the Israeli Ministry of Justice) – http://www.justice.gov.il/MOJHeb/HalbantHon/Pirsumim/

28. ‘The Islamic Movement inside Israel,” 69.


30. Petition to the Supreme Court no. 4706/02, Ra‘id Salah against the Minister of Interior (Hebrew), http://www.constitution.org.il/index.php?class=1&id=183&mytask=view&option=com_consti_comp


32. Salah responded to his verdict by saying: ‘I do not recognize this court, but I am not afraid of entering prison and being behind bars for the sake of al-Aqsa [mosque]’: Jecki Houri and Yehonatan Lis, Haaretz, January 13, 2010.

33. Israel does not have a specific incitement prohibition law. Incitement offences are included in the penal code that rules a five-year imprisonment for anyone ‘who publicizes something aiming at inciting racial hatred’ or ‘publicizes a call for committing a violent act or terrorism, praise, sympathy or the encouragement of violent acts or terrorism, supporting it or identifying with it’. See ‘The Penal Code, 1977, chapter 8: Harming regime’s and society’s orders, clause 1a: Incitement to racial hatred, violence or terrorism, and the rule’s amendments no. 10 and 40 (1986, 1994, respectively).

34. A similar decree was issued in 1990 by Minister of Interior Der‘i.

35. The authority to outlaw organizations, institutions and associations in Israel (by declaring them ‘unlawful associations’ or ‘terrorist organizations’) is given to the Minister of Defence or the government. See Ministry of Defence website (in Hebrew), http://www.mod.gov.il/pages/general/teror.asp


38. See for example Likud Knesset member Ruhama Avraham’s motion for the agenda: The 143th meeting of the 16th Knesset (June 16, 2004) – “‘The Waqf’’s unlawful building in Temple Mount.”

39. The 18th Knesset, second parliamentary session, protocol no. 238 from the meeting of the Education, Culture, and Sports Committee, June 21, 2010. Another meeting of this committee followed Salah’s visit to the University of Haifa by the invitation of an Arab students’ cell. A few committee members were annoyed by Salah’s use of freedom of expression and academic freedom to voice extremist opinions, as well as by the fact that Jewish students were prevented by the university’s security guards from attending the lecture (for fear of Arab–Jewish violence). Not surprisingly, Salah declined the committee’s invitation to give his account of the event. See the 18th Knesset, first parliamentary session, protocol 34 from the meeting of the Education, Culture and Sports Committee, June 24, 2009.

40. Bnei ha-Kfar (in Arabic: Abna al-Balad, literally the village’s sons) is a radical left-wing movement operating in Israel and identifying with the Palestinian struggle – http://www.abnaa-elbalad.org.

42. Israel Beitenu’s initiative was adopted, in a slightly different form, by the Israeli government when it approved the Law of Loyalty on October 2010. If that law is eventually approved by the Knesset, every new non-Jewish Israeli citizen will be obliged to pledge allegiance to the state of Israel as a Jewish and a democratic state. See: Eli Berdenstein, “The Ministers Approved in a Large Majority the Amendment to the Law of Citizenship,” nrg, October 6, 2010. The Law of Loyalty does not explicitly refer to the Arabs of Israel, but Israel Beitenu emphasized this connection in its 2009 elections campaign and its aftermath under the slogan ‘without loyalty there is no citizenship’.

43. Thus, for example, Liberman was quoted in its party’s website saying: ‘People like Haneen Zoabi [an Arab Israeli Knesset member who participated in the Mavi-Marmara’s flotilla] and the head of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement, Ra’id Salah, are fighting Zionism and as far as I am concerned should become citizens of the Palestinian Authority … The principle which shall lead us in the negotiations [with the Palestinians] is no “land for peace” but “territories–population exchange”’.


45. Thus, for example, 74.7% of the Jewish population in 2004 were of the opinion that the Islamic Movement should be outlawed (the poll did not differentiate between the two branches): Sammy Smooha, Arab–Jewish Relations Index 2004 (Haifa: University of Haifa, The Jewish–Arab Center, 2005), 27.

46. See for example the 2009 Israeli Democracy Index which showed that only half of Israelis supported the idea of equal rights between Jews and Arabs in Israel, and only a small minority thought that Arab ministers could join the government or that Arab citizens should participate in decisions crucial for the state. Almost half of the population thought that Arabs should be encouraged to leave the country: Asher Arian, Michael Philippov and Anna Knafelman, The 2009 Israeli Democracy Index: Auditing Israeli Democracy – Twenty Years of Immigration from the Soviet Union, The President’s Conference: Israeli Democracy Examined (Jerusalem: Guttmann Center of The Israel Democracy Institute, 2009), 64–8, 87.


