

Is Hamas Winning?

Hamas members are “ants,” declared Yasser Arafat, the father and long-time leader of the Palestinian national movement, during a private speech in 1990. Its cadre, he went on, should cower in their holes lest they be crushed by Arafat’s Fatah forces.¹ Arafat’s swagger seemed justified. Fatah had ruled the roost for decades, and after Hamas emerged in December 1987 as the first intifada erupted, the Islamist organization was on the ropes. After a few unimpressive attacks, Israel had quickly arrested over 1,000 Hamas members, including its top leadership.² In 1989, less than three percent of Palestinians in Gaza, where Hamas would later prove strongest, supported the organization.³ Journalist Zaki Chehab claimed Hamas’ military wing only had twenty machine guns as the intifada wound down.⁴ Fatah, it seemed, would remain the dominant force in the Palestinian National Movement.

Just over twenty-five years later, Hamas has turned the tables, becoming the de facto government of Gaza and threatening to surpass Fatah as the voice of the Palestinian people. Regardless of which dimension of success you look at—recognition from Arab and Muslim states, relations with Israel, and most importantly its position vis-à-vis Fatah—Hamas is emerging triumphant. Israel, the United States, and the international community must recognize the ugly truth: Hamas is winning, and it may be too late to reverse this trend.

The Palestinian Phoenix

Hamas’ rise reveals a dynamic organization which has capitalized on the mistakes of Fatah, its chief Palestinian rival, and Israel, its deadly enemy. At each stage, Hamas emerged scarred but triumphant from brushes with defeat. Now, it is even

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stronger and appears ready to overshadow the discredited government of Mahmoud Abbas, the Fatah leader who has led the Palestine Liberation Organization since 2004 and the Palestinian Authority since 2005.

In 1993, limited Palestinian self-rule began under the Palestinian Authority (PA), with Fatah and Hamas representing different political factions. Hamas positioned itself as the voice of rejectionism—opposing the existence of, recognition of, and negotiation with the state of Israel. The group's terrorist attacks made Israelis skeptical about negotiations and helped doom the talks. Hamas began the self-rule period as unpopular, but it would benefit from its rejectionist stance when peace talks collapsed completely in 2000 and the second intifada began. Though Israeli and Fatah security operations in the 1990s had left Hamas weak organizationally, its message—that negotiations were a fraud and violence was the key to liberation—now resonated, while its use of suicide bombings proved it could bring the war home to Israelis. Other Palestinians who opposed terrorism but were fed up with Fatah's corruption appreciated Hamas' hospitals, schools, and other social services.

Hamas' support surged as the violence exploded, but it still lost the second intifada operationally. Devastated by the arrests and killings of its leaders, and with ordinary Palestinians increasingly skeptical that violence was paying off, Hamas accepted a unilateral ceasefire in 2005. Yet its political credibility, reputation for probity, and organizational strength enabled it to win elections for

the Palestine Legislative Council in 2006. This resulted in a brief Palestinian civil war, in 2007 where Fatah and Hamas each saw themselves as the true representatives of the Palestinian people. Fatah secured control of the PA, and Hamas took over Gaza (limiting the PA's de facto authority to the West Bank). However, even though Hamas had gained true power, the Gaza it now ruled was a chaotic mess, and Hamas remained caged by Israel.

Egypt under President Hosni Mubarak supported the containment of Hamas, while the hope of renewed peace talks (which Israel would only conduct with Abbas) and an outpouring of international support gave Abbas better claim to the leadership of the Palestinian people.

The coalition that isolated Hamas in Gaza is now cracking.

Entering the World Stage

After Hamas took power in 2007, the united front that isolated Gaza included not only Israel and the United States but also Europe and leading Arab governments. This coalition is now cracking. High-level visitors including Egypt's former Prime Minister, the Emir of Qatar, the Turkish Foreign Minister,

and the head of the Arab League have all gone to Gaza in recent months, bringing with them promises of support and—perhaps more importantly—legitimacy for the Hamas government.

Hamas itself did not spark this change—it was the Arab Spring that shifted the bedrock of the Middle East and put Hamas squarely at the region’s core. After some dithering, Hamas in February 2012 dumped its longtime supporter, Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, despite their many years of cooperation and the anger this caused in Tehran, which is Hamas’ chief military supplier and Assad’s close ally. Hamas more than compensated the loss of Syrian support, however, with the increased backing of the anti-Syrian Islamist regimes that are in power in Turkey and are supported by countries like Qatar. Hamas, a Muslim Brotherhood spinoff, has close ideological (and in some cases personal) ties to Islamist movements elsewhere, particularly those with a Brotherhood slant. Despite hopes that the spread of democracy would reduce Arab hostility to Israel, as journalist Adam Shatz writes, “Hamas, not Israel, has been ‘normalized’ by the Arab uprisings.”⁵

This new normalcy paid off during the 2012 Hamas confrontation with Israel. Truce talks in Cairo saw Hamas negotiating with Egypt, Turkey, Qatar, and (indirectly) Israel; Abbas was nowhere to be seen. Khaled Meshal, who heads Hamas’ political wing, crowed that “for the first time a ceasefire was achieved on conditions set by Hamas, and in the presence of the Americans.”⁶

The international picture is not all rosy for Hamas, of course, and the organization has had serious setbacks as well as advances. Most nations, including the United States, continue to shun it. Hamas’ hopes soared when the Brotherhood won power in Egypt; the July coup was a hard blow. Egypt has tightened security along the Gaza border, shutting down tunnels and even barring Gazan fisherman from entering Egyptian waters. For Hamas to portray itself as the voice of the Palestinian people, it needs to be able to represent Palestinians abroad as well as govern them at home. Even among Hamas’ supporters, the situation is complex. Abandoning Syria did hurt Hamas’ relationship with Tehran and its ally, the Lebanese Hezbollah. “Ties between Lebanon’s Hezbollah and Hamas are currently at a stalemate as a result of the Syrian crisis,” declared one Hezbollah official. Iran is using Hamas’ perfidy in Syria to step up aid to rivals in Gaza like Palestine Islamic Jihad and the Popular Resistance Committees. Iran also cut financial support to the Hamas government in Gaza, worsening the Strip’s already considerable economic woes.

But it is too much to say that Tehran has dumped Hamas. After a much-heralded February 2012 speech in Egypt where Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh

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denounced Assad, another Hamas leader traveled to Tehran and praised the Iranian regime. As one Hamas figure told the International Crisis Group, “All of the speculation about Hamas abandoning Iran is silly. Who else is going to supply Hamas with weapons and training? Qatar? Turkey? Iran is the only option.”⁷ Indeed, after the 2012 clash with Israel, large billboards in Gaza declared, “Thank you Iran.”⁸ Tehran too has few alternatives. As Assad’s position crumbles, Tehran

needs Hamas more than ever as a bridge to the Arab world and to maintain a level of military threat to Israel.

So diplomatically, Hamas may get the best of both worlds: continued military support from Tehran, but greater legitimacy from U.S. allies like Qatar and Turkey.

The Israeli Frenemy

Hamas has long been Israel’s bitter enemy, but it has used Israel as a foil to gain international support and improve its position vis-à-vis its Palestinian rivals. Hamas has also made inroads against Israel itself, increasingly being accepted as a reality that must be accommodated.

Israel as always maintains its military edge, and with it the ability to coerce—and at times deter—Hamas. In the 2012 confrontation, Israel again proved formidable, destroying almost all of Hamas’ long-range rockets and showcasing its missile defense system to further minimize Israeli casualties. Yet, again, Hamas gained politically even as it lost militarily. Hamas rockets, while killing only six Israelis, emphatically demonstrated that Hamas remained unbowed even as Gaza got pounded. Despite Israeli rhetoric of ending the rocket strikes, Hamas was able to sustain its operations throughout the confrontation, in sharp contrast to its performance during Israel’s 2008–2009 “Cast Lead” operation, when the Israeli military devastated Hamas forces and hit Gaza hard during several weeks of fighting with little loss on the Israeli side. Strikes on Tel Aviv and other former sanctuaries deep in Israel underscored Hamas’ message that it was getting stronger, and Hamas replayed images of fearful Israelis hiding in bomb shelters to reinforce the point that Hamas was standing up to Israel. Internationally, Hamas portrayed Israel as a brutal aggressor, conveniently ignoring that its attacks on civilians provoked the latest round of fighting. From the negotiations, Hamas was also able to secure a tangible easing of the blockade, such as a greater fishing zone and the import of new building materials

into Gaza, both important concessions that up until that point had been unable to be obtained.

Indeed, Israel now accepts Hamas as an unpleasant reality. For example, in the 2008–2009 Cast Lead operation, some Israelis talked of bringing Fatah back to Gaza on IDF bayonets; in 2012, there was no such rhetoric. Even more important, Israel negotiated with Hamas (albeit via Egypt), proving that the October 2011 deal for captured IDF Sergeant Gilad Schalit was not a one-time event. As Hamas normalizes its position with Israel, that of the PA fades. As one Israeli official pointed out, Abbas “cannot even visit his own territory in Gaza . . . This is the theater of the absurd.”⁹

Israel also needs Hamas, ironically, as a force for moderation, because of the furies unleashed by the Arab Spring. The Sinai, never well-governed, is far more chaotic now, with al-Qaeda-like jihadist organizations taking root there and plotting attacks on Israel—plots aided by a flood of weapons from looted arsenals in Libya. For now, however, both Israel and Hamas see the jihadists as an enemy. But a weak Hamas or all-out Hamas hostility both increase the risk of jihadist attacks on Israel from the Sinai.

Hamas should be at a fork in the road in its relationships with Israel: choosing between ending violence while becoming a respectable government of Gaza and risking its political position with its continued attacks. Hamas, however, has the luxury of not making a choice: it is not given the true freedom to govern and the peace process is at best just getting started, so Hamas can continue to justify using violence and repeat its constant claim that peace talks are a sham. As a result, Hamas has been able to ease differences within its ranks over what concessions, if any, to make in the name of peace and governance. Indeed, many within Hamas believe that both Israeli concessions regarding economic development in Gaza and the favorable changes in the region will make Hamas even stronger if it simply bides its time. Even more important, Hamas has been able to dodge responsibility for Gaza’s weak economy and other problems, claiming that the international community and Israel are at fault for the mess in Gaza and that its use of violence is forcing better conditions through Israeli concessions.

So, Hamas can pretend to be both moderate and uncompromising on core issues such as whether to resist or work with Israel. Meshal in 2007 told Reuters that “we are with the consensus of the necessity of establishing a Palestinian state on the June 4 [1967] borders,”¹⁰ a position that is a de facto acceptance of Israel’s existence. Yet, Hamas refuses to explicitly recognize Israel’s right to exist and, after the 2012 conflict, Meshal declared in a visit to Gaza, “Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north. There will be no concession on an inch of the land.”¹¹ Rather than pay a price for its double talk, Hamas is scoring points with both moderates and rejectionists.

Hamas Rising or Fatah Falling?

Helping Hamas gain further stature is the failure of Palestinian moderates—as well as the United States, Israel, supportive Arab regimes, and others who claim to be their friends—to offer a credible alternative. Since the 1960s, Fatah was the dominant force in Palestinian politics. Yet since Hamas' emergence in 1987, and in particular after the collapse of peace talks in 2000, Fatah and traditional secular forces have declined, while Hamas has soared.

To arrest Hamas' rise after it won elections in 2006, the United States and Israel encouraged a zero-sum situation that told Palestinians to choose between Fatah and Hamas. With this in mind, U.S. policy has ostensibly tried to make the choice easy by associating Fatah with economic prosperity, better governance, international legitimacy, and the prospect of peace. Indeed, the standard recommendation for countering Hamas, with which I agree, is to build up moderate Palestinians like Abbas and Salam Fayad, his prime minister who quit in 2013, through economic as well as security support and especially robust peace negotiations. But in reality, Washington has had little success ensuring that “our guy” wins. Since Hamas' Gaza takeover in 2007, the United States has backed economic development, rule of law, humanitarian, and democratic reform projects to help the Palestinians.¹² At best, these have worked fitfully, and even the successes rest on weak foundations.

The Palestinian economy in the West Bank, while growing, remains highly dependent on foreign assistance. Unemployment is over 20 percent, and the IMF describes the PA's fiscal situation as “very challenging.”¹³ The situation is worse in Gaza, of course, but whether justified or not, Hamas can point to crippling international pressure to scapegoat any failings. The PA has no such excuse.

Corruption remains endemic. Elliott Abrams, the George W. Bush administration's point man for the Middle East, testified that the United States and its Western allies missed the importance of corruption: “We persuaded ourselves that it was smart to overlook it, to make believe it was a minor peccadillo of no real weight or import.” Abrams went on to point out, “That was a very damaging position for our country to take, it signaled to Palestinians who were disgusted with public corruption that we were not interested and were not going to hold Arafat to account. And it was condescending, suggesting that we thought Arabs, or Palestinian Arabs, could not really be expected to have honest public institutions.”¹⁴ Hamas, while hardly pure, has far cleaner hands, in part because it has been out of power until recently, and as a result has had less time to become corrupt.

Politically, the situation is even worse. Abbas has not held elections or otherwise used the democratic process to legitimate his rule. He lacks charisma, and his support and credibility are limited at best. Freedom House in 2012

bluntly ranked the media environment in the West Bank as “not free,”¹⁵ and attacks on journalists are common. Palestinian human rights organizations regularly document the torture of detainees at the hands of Palestinian security services.¹⁶ Former Prime Minister Salam Fayad is rightly admired in the West for his efforts to build Palestinian institutions and develop the rule of law, but he has little support at home (indeed, part of why Abbas used Fayad was because he pleased Western donors but posed no political threat to Abbas’ power, and part of why he could dump him so easily is that Fayad had few powerful backers at home). Increasingly, Abbas’ government is only in power because the regime’s security services prevent any alternative groups from organizing. Abbas is a moderate in foreign policy, but a dictator at home. As Fayad himself now says, “Our story is a story of failed leadership, from way early on.”¹⁷

As a group, Fatah’s ideology is no longer vibrant and has little appeal beyond patronage for the many young Palestinians. Throughout the Arab world, the Marxist and leftist-tinged Arab nationalism which dominated discourse in the 1950s and 1960s is in decline, with political Islam ascendant. Fatah leader Husam Khadir told the Hamas media outlet *Filastin al-Yawm*, “Fatah is now in a pitiful condition. It is going through its worst state because of the complete absence of the role of its leadership, absenting [sic] and marginalizing the role of the institution, and not extending support by the top of the Fatah pyramid.”¹⁸

A peace deal seems far away, and an agreement even farther. In his first year as President, Barack Obama tried to move the ball forward by pushing a settlement freeze. This backfired, uniting Israelis against U.S. efforts (and creating a lasting scorn for Obama) while doing little to win over Palestinians.

Secretary of State Kerry, however, has revived talks in July, but he will find it difficult to achieve a breakthrough. The conservative Benjamin Netanyahu government is skeptical regarding concessions in the name of peace, and over half of Israelis believe peace with the Palestinians will never happen.¹⁹ Although recent elections led to some gains for moderates, their platforms were almost entirely about domestic issues, and they made it clear that the Palestinian issue was not a priority.

Palestinians for their part are divided, with pro-peace voices politically weak. The split between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank has made it hard for any Palestinian leader to speak for the Palestinian people, and thus be able to credibly make painful concessions at the negotiating table. (Indeed, because of the split any serious concession would lead to furious condemnation by rivals.) Palestinian skepticism and cynicism make this even harder. A poll taken last year found that most Palestinians believe a two-state solution is no longer viable,

and over two-thirds think the chances of negotiations succeeding in the next five years are “low” or “non-existent.”²⁰

Making this worse, Israel regularly undermines moderates by focusing on rhetorical concessions while ignoring what should be most important: its own security. Menachem Begin, hardly a peacenik, declared, “I re-emphasize that we do not expect anyone to request, on our behalf, that our right to exist in the land of our fathers be recognized.”²¹ In 1993, Yasser Arafat, in his exchange of letters with Prime Minister Rabin in response to U.S. and international demands, declared that “The PLO recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security.” In 2009, though, Netanyahu went further and demanded that Israel be recognized as “the Jewish state”²² and later declared Abbas “must face his people, the Palestinian people, and say ‘I will accept the Jewish state.’”²³ As Martin Indyk, Kerry’s chosen peace negotiator, contended, “[E]verybody can build up a narrative of how the Palestinians are extremist in this way or in that way, and God knows the Palestinians help reinforce that narrative, but there’s also an element of continually raising the bar. We had Foreign Minister [Avigdor] Lieberman at—when he was Foreign Minister—at the Saban Forum this year and he said that until the Palestinians have . . . \$10,000 per capita GNP and studied Rousseau and Voltaire, then they’ll deserve a state.” Indyk then pointed out that Israel had its state when per capita GDP was well below \$10,000 and that Palestinians actually do have Rousseau and Voltaire in their curriculum.²⁴

The true key for Israel is not philosophy, but security. Palestinian security forces do the bulk of the heavy lifting in providing security in the West Bank, yet they get little political credit for doing so. Continued and improved security should be the precondition, and focus, of an agreement rather than politically difficult rhetoric that has little or no impact on the lives of Israelis.

Instead, Israeli governments seem to take this security assistance for granted, putting at risk this vital form of cooperation. Abbas has long banked on cutting a deal with Israel to advance his political legitimacy, but the moderate message that negotiations, not violence, will bring about a Palestinian state rings hollow if peace talks are not seen as making significant progress. For Palestinian security forces, as long as there was clear progress toward an independent state, they can imprison and repress fellow Palestinians while claiming they are doing so in the name of liberation at the peace table. With no hope of a deal, however, they worry that cooperation would be seen as collaboration. And if security cooperation becomes politically unsustainable, terrorism is more likely to return on a mass scale.

The United States treats security as a technical issue, using training and other forms of assistance to improve it, but security cooperation rests on political foundations. During the 1990s, Israeli cooperation with Palestinian

forces put Hamas' back to the wall. When peace talks stalled, security cooperation became discredited. When the second intifada broke out, success quickly became failure: some Palestinian security forces joined the violence, while others simply looked the other way or went home. Current cooperation is at risk of a similar collapse, with Palestinian security officials feeling that a lack of progress on peace will irredeemably compromise their integrity and political position.

In short, Abbas and the moderates are not delivering. The Palestinian economy remains fragile, the political foundations of security cooperation are weak, and his government has no democratic legitimacy. Abbas' hope of bringing about a Palestinian state through peace talks has also come up empty so far. Not surprisingly, Palestinians are questioning his leadership and looking for alternatives; so, Hamas is pushing on an open door.

Becoming the Voice of the Palestinian People

Hamas has exploited Fatah's weakness, Israeli policies, and the failure of the international community to bolster moderate Palestinian leaders. Indeed, from Hamas' point of view, it has made its most important strides in the intra-Palestinian arena, gaining more credibility among ordinary Palestinians at the expense of Abbas and Fatah. The biggest challenge after taking power in 2007 was simply governing Gaza, which was beset by crime, factional fighting, and a collapse in social services. International isolation and a stifling blockade only seemed to make the problem worse. Yet, Hamas more than rose to the challenge, purging the old Fatah-dominated structure and installing a leaner, far more effective, replacement. Hamas restored law and order and proved up to the challenge of organizing the Strip. Hamas' military wing, once largely in the business of suicide bombings and cheap mortar attacks, morphed into a regular military force with thousands of troops under arms and more advanced weapons systems.

International support for Hamas is bolstering it vis-à-vis its rivals. Abbas long argued that his, and only his, government could garner the international recognition necessary to end the isolation of Gaza and otherwise represent the Palestinians effectively. As Hamas' isolation declines, this argument is crumbling.

Even more importantly, Israel has inadvertently bolstered Hamas over its rivals. In Palestinian eyes, Hamas' argument that force, not negotiations,

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produces concessions has repeatedly shown itself to be true. Hamas claims that its attacks forced Israel from Gaza in 2005—an overstatement, but it certainly was not negotiations that did the trick. The subsequent prisoner exchange where Israel released over 1,000 Palestinians for Israeli soldier Gilad Schalit further bolstered Hamas' point. And now, after the 2012 conflict, Israel agreed to reduce economic restrictions on Gaza. During all this time, peace talks stalled and settlements grew; the contrast to Palestinians is striking. As one Palestinian told the *New York Times*, Hamas “proved that they are much better than the negotiating camp. In the days of Arafat, we used to think peace could be achieved through negotiations, but nobody believes this now.”²⁵

Hamas, however, remains organizationally weak in the West Bank, though even here its position is improving. It is hard to judge how strong popular support for Hamas is in the West Bank—polling is not reliable in authoritarian states, though some say that Hamas would beat Fatah in an election for the presidency.²⁶ But pressure from Israeli and PA security services have devastated the Hamas cadre there. As more Palestinians live in the West Bank than in Gaza, Hamas seeks to make inroads there as a next step.

Hamas' credibility, however, grows stronger because of the rot within Fatah and the willingness of Israel to respond more to Hamas' use of violence than to Abbas' words at the negotiating table. One December 2012 poll of Palestinians asked, “given the outcome of the war between Hamas and Israel and the UN recognition of a Palestinian state, whose way is the best to end the Israeli occupation and build a Palestinian state: Hamas' way or Abbas' way?”²⁷ Sixty percent said Hamas' way; 28 percent said Abbas'.

Implications of Hamas' Rise

An empowered Hamas makes peace less likely, bolsters an undemocratic and illiberal force within Palestinian society, and risks a return to a far bloodier conflict than what we saw in 2012. Yet with Fatah imploding, the world must recognize that the Islamist movement is here to stay and may even represent the Palestinian future.

One critique of working more directly with Hamas is that it weakens Palestinian moderates. This argument is true, but the moderates are already very weak. Indeed, it is questionable whether Abbas has the legitimacy to cut a deal, and even if he did, whether he has the political clout to implement any promises he would make. Israeli fears that Hamas could one day replace Abbas on the West Bank risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy: as Israel stays in the West Bank, it undermines Abbas' credibility and bolsters Hamas. In addition, polls show that Gazans are often more critical of Hamas than Palestinians on the

West Bank, who can cheer on “resistance” while Gazans pay the price of Hamas’ aggression.

Foreign aid, ironically, makes this weakness even greater. The Palestinian economy in the West Bank depends on foreign aid, making Abbas less accountable to Palestinians there and enabling him to buy off critics, both of which inhibit democratization. Aid also fosters corruption, further weakening government legitimacy. At the very least, anti-corruption measures should be built into any aid so U.S. attempts to help do not make the problem worse.

But if by inaction the moderates weaken further, the only alternative is to try to force Hamas to move away from violence. Since Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, the United States has been wedded to the so-called “Quartet Conditions” laid out by the UN, EU, Russia, and the United States: Hamas must recognize Israel, abide by previous agreements, and renounce violence. These should remain the ultimate goals, but renouncing violence is far more important than recognition of Israel and

Renouncing violence is far more important than recognition of Israel and a necessary first step.

a necessary first step in any event. U.S. policy should recognize this priority, particularly as Hamas’ position is only likely to improve.

The United States should not recognize Hamas until it categorically rejects violence, but it can use its allies to try to move this along. Because important U.S. allies like Turkey and Qatar have reached out to Hamas on their own, the United States can encourage them to push Hamas to signal it would not oppose a negotiated deal with Israel and to move away from violence. Their own hostility toward Iran, which encourages Hamas to embrace violence, will help them make this move. (Hamas also loses politically from its ties to Iran, which is unpopular among most Sunni Islamists.) From Hamas’ point of view, maintaining ties to other Arab and Muslim states enhance its legitimacy at home and are a sign that it recognizes it can achieve some of its goals through political rather than violent means.

Egypt is particularly influential given its proximity to Gaza, its control of Sinai, and President Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood affiliation. Given the chaos and uncertainty in Egypt after the June demonstrations and July coup in 2013, Egypt’s future role regarding Hamas is not clear. Even under the Brotherhood-run regime, however, fears that Egypt would rush to embrace its soul brother Hamas and encourage anti-Israel violence proved false. Egypt has stepped up cooperation with Israel on the border and even flooded Hamas tunnels with sewage. Cairo, in other words, was signaling to all that it cared more about international acceptance and prosperity at home than it does about Hamas and

Gaza. Under a more military-influenced regime, this domestic focus is likely to grow further, and the regime will be wary of doing anything that might increase the Brotherhood's influence in Egypt—including helping its perceived ally in Gaza.

Washington can capitalize regime change in Egypt by pushing the government to do even more to move Hamas away from violence. The fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt make Hamas leaders less confident that international legitimacy and the collapse of more secular forces is inevitable. Both incentives and threats become more meaningful in this context.

In short, the United States can tolerate Hamas' further diplomatic rise if the Palestinian movement pays the price by moving away from its "resistance" model. Israeli policy would match this with opportunities on the ground, continuing to expand Hamas' ability to govern Gaza if—and only if—it does not use violence. At the same time, Israel, with strong U.S. support, would continue to improve its defenses against Hamas missiles and prepare to employ (and when

necessary use) force, should Hamas continue to support using violence.

Trying to transform Hamas is necessary both because bolstering moderates may fail and because Hamas maintains the power to stop the peace process. Indeed, apart from all the usual (and justified) arguments for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, a peaceful deal also makes it more likely that Hamas will not become the dominant

voice of the Palestinian people. For if the talks fail and Palestinian moderates continue to falter, Hamas will emerge the victor.

The current drift in policy is the worst of all worlds.

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