Hamas: Pragmatic Ideology
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Since Hamas won control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in January of 2006, it became imperative that its Islamic ideology be better understood. Hamas' Charter "is anchored in religious principles of holiness, divinity, and eternity, with no option for amendment."[1] At first glance, this assessment is not very promising, especially considering that the Charter outlines Hamas' long-term goal as the establishment of an Islamic state in all of historic Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Although it appears that this ideology is not followed strictly in practice, it remains uncertain what combination of ideology and realpolitik drives Hamas' decision-making. In seeking to uncover this balance, this paper focuses on the two major elements fortifying Hamas' long-term goal: the holiness of Palestine and the exhortation to *jihad*. First, Hamas' long-term goal, approach, and interpretation of Palestine and *jihad* are explained, and then compared to more traditional Islamic interpretations. Second, Hamas' positions and actions during the three main phases of its existence are explained to demonstrate that, to a degree, Hamas is pragmatic and flexible in the implementation of its ideology, if for nothing else, than to retain its base of public support.

ULTIMATE GOAL

In August 1988 "Hamas presented an Islamic platform that blatantly appropriated the PLO's [Palestinian Liberation Organization] national values...[and cast them] in Islamic terminology

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and the Islamic belief system."[2] This Charter haphazardly proclaimed Hamas' views on a number of topics in order to provide an ideological explanation of its long-term goal of an Islamic state in all of Palestine. Three quotes from the Charter introduce the basic elements of Hamas' ideology. First, the Charter quotes from the Qur'an (Q 3:110-2), calling for Muslims to return to the faith. The return to Islam and the religious and military superiority of Muslims over "People of the Book"[3] are central pillars of Hamas' ideology.

Second, the Charter quotes from Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: "Israel will be established and will stay established until Islam nullifies it as it nullified what was before it."[4] This is important for several reasons. First, it locates Hamas ideologically within the scope of the Muslim Brotherhood. Similar to other Islamic movements, a core component of Hamas' diagnostic frame is the conception that "the true path to development and success is outlined in the sources of Islam."[5] Second, Al-Banna's quote emphasizes the destruction of Israel as a precondition for achieving Hamas' long-term goal of an Islamic state in all of Palestine, and emphasizes violence as the primary tool for reaching this goal. It also vaguely underlines the significance of the land of Palestine.

Third, Hamas quotes Amjad al-Zahawee, a Muslim Brotherhood leader in Iraq, to emphasize that "it is obligatory on every [Muslim within the Islamic world]"[6] to participate in the struggle to achieve an Islamic state in all of Palestine." This transforms the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a political conflict to a societal conflict in which all members are responsible for the outcome. In so doing,

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Hamas manipulates an unorthodox interpretation of *jihad* for the purpose of mass mobilization, even appealing to Muslims outside Palestine.

Hamas' long-term goal remains to create "a Palestinian Islamic state on the territory of Palestine that would replace Israel."[7] Its short-term goals are more pragmatic, including ensuring its political and military position in Gaza and the West Bank, maintaining its strong domestic support by ameliorating daily living conditions through improvements in the economy, infrastructure, and governance, as well as strengthening its international position. Recognizing the overriding importance of Hamas' long-term goal helps place much of its contemporary policy and strategy in context. Despite its active struggle to achieve its immediate objectives, the long-term aim of establishing an Islamic state in Palestine "remained central to Hamas even as its political position evolved."[8] From the foundation of the movement in 1987 to the present day, the vision of an Islamic Palestinian state remains the definitive characteristic of Hamas' ideology.

PALESTINE

Hamas justifies the struggle for an Islamic state in Palestine by characterizing Palestine as a *waqf*, or an Islamic trust. Article 11 of the Charter claims that the *Shari'a* forbids anyone from relinquishing any part of Palestine "because the land of Palestine is an Islamic Trust upon all generations until the day of Resurrection."[9] This means that Palestine is a part of God's sovereign territory and is, therefore, sacrosanct. Hamas claims, in Article 13, that to give up any part of Palestine is to give up part of Islam. Traditionally, a *waqf* is "an unincorporated trust established under Islamic law by a living man or women for the provision of a designated social service in perpetuity."[10] Once a property is transferred into a *waqf*, that property no longer belongs to any person, party or state; the principal becomes inviolable. Under numerous Muslim empires, the "sacredness of the *waqf* gave it considerable protection against confiscation,"[11] because such an act was seen as extremely impious. It is this impiety that Hamas emphasizes in relation to Palestine.

That all of Palestine is sacred territory is a controversial assertion. While Mecca and Medina are considered sacred within Islam and Jerusalem contains many holy sites, the idea that the entirety of Palestine is sacred may come from the slightly ambiguous Qur'anic "citations referring to *Bilad al-Sham* of which Jerusalem was a part, as 'The Holy Land.'"[12] The exact boundaries of the Holy Land are not agreed upon by Muslim scholars, but estimates range from including everything between the Euphrates and Egypt to including only select holy sites somewhere in between. At least, it seems clear that part of the territory of Palestine, in addition to Jerusalem and its environs, is included in this designation and, therefore, can be considered holy.

Jerusalem's religious stature is enhanced by its long and distinguished place in Islamic history, both as territory under Muslim rule and as an important religious location threatened by external, non-Muslim enemies. Jerusalem was first under Muslim rule following the initial expansion from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century. However, beginning with the Crusades, Jerusalem became a focal point for religious struggle. Throughout this period Jerusalem was seen as the jewel of Palestine by the Christian crusaders, and they eventually captured it with great bloodshed and suffering on the part of its resident Muslims and Jews. Salah Ad-din recaptured the city almost 100 years later, and Hamas memorializes him in the Charter for returning the Holy City to Muslim control.[13] In 1917 General Allenby conquered the city for Christian Britain; and British rule lasted into the late 1940's, when plans for Muslim rule were again disrupted. In 1948, Jerusalem was divided between Jewish Israeli and Muslim Jordanian rule. The city was reunified by Israel in 1967. This long history of bloody struggle centering on the Holy City served to enhance the status and intangible aura of Jerusalem, both religiously and popularly. Combining this history with the more recent Palestinian frustration in the twentieth century helped elevate Jerusalem from city to symbol.

This history is significant beyond its mobilizing role in war. As a prized and contested territory with substantial religious, emotional, and historical connotations, the religious significance of Palestine transformed into a nationalistic sentiment for Palestinians. The Charter states that "[n]ationalism from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas], is a part and parcel of religious ideology."[14] Hamas deviated from its Islamist background in this regard. It shifted from stern opposition to the Western notion of a territorially-based nation-state, to accepting Palestine as the only rightful home for Palestinians. Armed conflict over Palestine directly shaped Hamas' religious ideology. The modern "confrontation with the Jewish doctrine embodied in the state of Israel seems to have made necessary this innovation in traditional Islamic thought."[15] The sacralization of Palestine is an innovation from Hamas' Islamist roots that produces an unusual blend of nationalism and Islam. Hamas rejects the incompatibility of Islam and a territorial nation-

state by adopting Palestinian nationalism as "part of the Islamic creed, [meaning that] to give up any inch of Palestine would mean abandoning part of the creed."[16] This mix of nationalism and religion is one way that Hamas justifies pragmatic action in spite of an otherwise rigid ideology.

JIHAD

After establishing Palestine as a holy territory, Hamas needed to demonstrate the legitimacy of waging a mandatory, individual, and violent religious struggle against Israel. It does so using a sophisticated interpretation of the concept of the lesser *jihad*, often associated with asserting justice in the outer world (as opposed to within oneself). In Article Seven of the Charter, Hamas describes its *jihad* as a historical continuation of the *jihad* in Palestine begun by Izz al-Din al-Qassam in the Arab Revolt in 1936, and continued by the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1948 War and after 1968. Drawing on these historical connections provides a historical legitimacy to the organization.

The Charter even eschews peace conferences as useless: there is "no solution to the Palestinian Problem except by *jihad*. The initiative, options, and international conferences are a waste of time and a kind of child's play."[17] Instead, Hamas emphasizes violence as the primary tool to achieve its aims. It allies itself with "all the *mujahedeen* who strive to free Palestine."[18] Promotion of violence and physical resistance permeates the Charter. Article 15 reinforces this by pronouncing *jihad* as mandatory and requires the adoption of Islamic education by Palestinians in Palestine. Hamas views the struggle with Israel from an integrated, long-term perspective that considers the preconditions for victory to be both military success and the supremacy of Islam in government and society. *Jihad* and the Islamization of Palestinian society share a common starting point: "the spread of the Islamic consciousness"[19] through society via lesser *jihad*. Therefore, Hamas' goal is to "use all available means [not just violence] to keep *jihad* and the issue [the liberation of Palestine] alive until such time as the requirements for victory materialize"[20] and are achieved.

Hamas' interpretation and exhortation of *jihad* to its followers relies on the unique circumstances of the Palestinian struggle for statehood, and the clear applicability of the modernist concept of defensive *jihad*. This non-traditional school of thought limits the declaration of a legitimate *jihad* to a range of circumstances such as "positive oppression or obstruction in the exercise of their faith. . . [or] an attack on the territory of Islam."[21] An attack on the territory of Palestine is the most prominent element in the *jihad* espoused by Hamas. As Andrea Nüsse argues, the "right to *Jihad* in the Palestinian case is even admitted by the most defensive, apologetic trends in modern Islamic thought."[22] Therefore, it is sensible for Hamas to emphasize the defensive aspects of *jihad* and to utilize the legitimacy these bring, for broad political mobilization.

Hamas often justifies specific acts of violence that violate the traditional tenets of *jihad* protecting civilians as responses "to the various massacres committed by the Zionists against the Palestinian people."[23] Its preferred and most common tactics against Israel explicitly target civilians and contradict the limitations on violence during a *jihad*. Traditional interpretations of *jihad* delineate which wars are legitimate, and, even within a legitimate war, limit the use of force against an adversary. These interpretations forbid "warriors to kill non-combatants like children, women and old people."[24] Hamas also deviates from a modernist interpretation limiting the need to wage *jihad* if the odds of victory are slim. This view originates in the Qur'anic statement (Q 2:195) saying: "cast not yourselves by your own hands into destruction."[25] Generally speaking, Hamas' use of violence seems to fit with modernist interpretations of defensive *jihad*, however, the permission of self-defense is not focused solely on military force. On the contrary, the "use of force should be avoided unless it is, in just war parlance, a 'last resort.'"[26] That Hamas does not share this perspective is evident in both its promotion of violent struggle as the primary means of resisting the Israeli occupation and the almost categorical rejection of peace conferences.

Hamas innovates when combining the view of *jihad* as an individual duty with the nonviolent element of the lesser *jihad*. In the case of a defensive *jihad*, "*jihad* becomes obligatory for all people capable in a certain region if this region is attacked by the enemy."[27] The connection to Palestine is obvious. Hamas innovates from this classical interpretation by including in its call to *jihad* those not usually considered capable of fighting, such as the elderly, women, and children. Generally, their inclusion is limited to a nonviolent element of *jihad* known as *dawa*. *Dawa* is traditionally interpreted as an "obligation to spread true Islam [that] covers a

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wide spectrum of outreach activity,"[28] mainly social welfare that is not directly connected to violence. Hamas' violent rhetoric often overshadows its strong emphasis on this element of *jihad*. Providing social services and seeking social justice falls under the concept of the "lesser *jihad*" of which war is only one part.[29] Concrete figures are difficult to obtain, but one estimate states that Hamas "allocates almost all its revenues (95 percent) to its social services."[30] Yet, this spending demonstrates a disparity between ideology and practice. Despite the emphasis on social services in practice, ideologically, Hamas' Charter focuses heavily on the violent nature of *jihad*. Further, Hamas' leadership dedicates its time, political capital, and often lives to pursuing the violent struggle, not the mission of *dawa*. Social services ensure popularity, but violence provides a means to winning the struggle.

IDEOLOGY IN APPLICATION

Hamas' ideology is not simply an abstract mantra. On the contrary, Hamas has rigorous internal debates over collisions of ideology and policy. Hamas has been very innovative in applying its ideology while addressing practical concerns on the ground. The three periods of Hamas' organizational life, its founding during the first *intifada*, the Oslo Process, and the post-Oslo period, offer salient examples where Hamas altered its ideology to permit pragmatic action.

First Intifada

Prior to the outbreak of the first *intifada*, the Muslim Brotherhood did not reject the doctrine of armed struggle to liberate Palestine, but it refrained from actively participating in violence. The *intifada* was "a catalyst for a process of differentiation and debate"[31] within the Brotherhood between the cautious older leadership, and the younger leaders who were involved in active resistance and demanded a role for nationalism. Hamas traces its lineage to the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose leadership created Hamas as a separate, affiliated wing in 1987. Notably, ideological conviction was not the primary impetus for establishing the new wing. Instead, popular pressure on the Brotherhood from competing groups exacerbated pre-existing differences within its leadership cadre over the role of violent *jihad*.

Even before the outbreak of the *intifada*, pressure rose on the Brotherhood to adopt a more active policy. Well-publicized and widely-supported violence carried out by the Palestinian Islamic *Jihad* and, to a lesser extent, Fatah "spurred the Muslim Brothers to follow suit."[32] The *intifada*

increased the prominence of active resistance and the internal split deepened until it "eventually resulted in a compromise between the communal-educational reformist approach [of the older leadership] and the combatant activist approach of defensive *jihad*"[33] advocated by the younger leadership. The result formed the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, as an independent wing of the Brotherhood. As the *intifada* escalated, nationalism and religion intertwined even more closely, and "it became clear that for Hamas the concept of *jihad* was strongly related to the objectives of the Palestinian national movement."[34] This dual explanation of popular pressure and divided leadership places immediate doubt on the rigid centrality of ideology as the determining factor underlying Hamas' strategic decision making.

In founding Hamas, the leadership demonstrated that their concerns for political power, not solely their ideology, influenced policy-making. Initially, the leadership was driven by fear of an Israeli response that would threaten both its own physical well-being, and the well-being of the Brotherhood's institutions. These fears were not unfounded: Hamas' spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, was imprisoned in 1989, shortly after the start of the *intifada*. The political and religious compromise was a means for reducing the risk to the Brotherhood. Creating Hamas as a new organization was a way of joining the *intifada* "without putting their future and the future of the movement [The Muslim Brotherhood] in jeopardy."[35] The Brotherhood enjoyed a level of popularity and had an established position in society to protect. This offered benefits to Hamas. It ensured an immediate and substantial following. The leadership invested heavily to earn such respect through its network of social service institutions, so it was reluctant to risk its investment solely to participate in the resistance. A separate organization also provided the benefit of plausible deniability. Ultimately, Hamas overshadowed and absorbed the Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood, but the leadership's initial concern for the survival of the Brotherhood's institutions demonstrates limitations in its adherence to the ideology.

The Oslo Process

When Hamas' ideology presents a threat to the organization, it is willing to deviate from that ideology, though not necessarily contradict it. The signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) on September 13, 1993 between Israel and the PLO represents "*the* great challenge faced by Hamas"[36] since its inception, both ideologically and pragmatically. Ideologically, the DOP inherently

challenged Hamas' long-term goal of establishing an Islamic state in all of Palestine to be achieved via *jihad*. The DOP renounced violence and effectively relinquished the Palestinian claim to 78 percent of British Mandated Palestine, thereby violating Hamas' ideology on Palestine and *jihad*. On the pragmatic level, devolving Israeli power to the PA implicitly threatened Hamas' legitimacy, military capabilities, and provision of social services by legitimizing the PA and its infrastructure. The PA's overwhelming popularity prevented Hamas from mounting a direct challenge; instead, it was forced to moderate. This pressure to moderate provided Hamas with cover for adopting policies driven by self-interest and self-preservation, rather than ideological conviction.

Hamas realized that events were overtaking its ideology. As a popular political movement, Hamas "was bound to respond to, and interact with, changing political realities."[37] In response to the PA's and its majority party Fatah's popularity, Hamas was obliged to subdue its criticism of Oslo. It refrained from directly denouncing the individuals affiliated with Oslo, and from using overly inflammatory language. Yassin wrote from prison that Oslo was "ignominy, capitulation, and abasement of the Palestinian cause," and that the security arrangements were "treasonous."[38] Not once did Hamas call to overthrow Arafat.

Cognizant of the lack of public support for its position, Hamas used its welfare services to increase its influence and popularity at the expense of the PLO.[39] Addressing the daily needs of Palestinians fostered loyalty among the Palestinian population and provided a clear sense of its political as well as practical limitations. At this time of great optimism and hope for major change in Palestinians' way of life, blind adherence to ideology would have cost Hamas dearly. During the height of Oslo in 1996, Fatah could claim the support of 55 percent of the Palestinian people compared to only 13 percent for all Islamist groups combined.[40] Yet straying too far from Hamas' ideological roots threatened to alienate its more radical adherents. Therefore, to maintain its following across the political spectrum, Hamas steered a middle course.

When Arafat signed the DOP he took two major steps that brought the PLO into direct ideological conflict with Hamas. He effectively relinquished the majority of Palestine to Israel, and repudiated the doctrine of *jihad*. This led Hamas to employ two lines of criticism for these concessions:

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religious and practical. It differentiated itself from the secular arguments used by the PLO and insisted on the "religious illegality of the agreement with Israel."[41] Hamas emphasized that any recognition of Israel violated Palestine's *waqf* status. By renouncing the Palestinian claim to 78 percent of Palestine, the PLO explicitly agreed that the eventual state of Palestine would comprise only the limited territory of Gaza and the West Bank. This contravenes the Charter, which clearly states that no one has the right to relinquish any piece of Palestine: "[i]t is not right to give it up nor any part of it."[42] On a practical level, Hamas criticized the PLO for gaining meager territory, and abandoning Jerusalem and the settlements to Israeli control. Further, Hamas publicly registered its expectation of the eventual failure of Oslo, characterizing Israeli ideology on Jerusalem as uncompromising. This practical criticism led Hamas to the conclusion that the DOP will only "delay the liberation"[43] of Palestine to an unknown future date.

Oslo established negotiations as the primary means for achieving a Palestinian state. In the exchange of letters accompanying the DOP, the PLO renounced violence as a tool for resolution of the conflict. This change brought Hamas and the PLO into direct conflict over ending violent operations against Israel. As explained above, *jihad* comprises a central element of Hamas' ideology, and this renunciation of violence entailed a direct attack on Hamas' fundamental values. With high public support for negotiations and a two-state solution, Hamas was forced to modify its ideology. "Hamas' deepest concern was for the future of *jihad* against Israel,"[44] but Fatah's political and military dominance forced Hamas to reduce its violence.

By challenging Hamas' emphasis on *jihad* as the primary tool for regaining Palestine, the PLO forced Hamas to reconsider its ideology. Using the premise that Oslo would eventually fail, Hamas proclaimed that *jihad* would continue permanently, "not [as] a political choice, but a religious duty and therefore cannot be negotiated."[45] This simplistic religious explanation was insufficient in the face of Oslo's broad popularity. Therefore, Hamas also justified the need for continued *jihad* on practical grounds: that the Israeli withdrawal was incomplete according to UN Resolution 242. The inherent contradiction, that 242 contravened Hamas' ideology because it recognized the State of Israel, did not present Hamas with an impediment to using it as a basis for criticizing Oslo.

The primary way in which Hamas modified its ideological and policy positions was through dual strategies of short and long-term goals. To retain mainstream support, Hamas developed a concept of the near-term in which the PLO was criticized, but not treated as an enemy for signing an agreement with Israel. Hamas accepted a temporary delay in *jihad* and made establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza the short-term goal. The long-term goal remained the same: establishing an Islamic state in all of Palestine, thereby ensuring that Hamas would retain its more ardent supporters. However, this was subordinate to the long-term goal "by emphasizing the transitional nature and temporary status of any political settlement with Israel."[46] Developing a short-term goal provided Hamas flexibility, so its criticism could expand beyond the religious elements and demonstrate concern with concrete practical matters to "play the role of a "positive" opposition to the ruling power."[47] In the aftermath of Oslo, Hamas "appeared as a pragmatic political force despite a sometimes flamboyant rhetoric"[48] by criticizing Oslo and the subsequent agreements for their failings in the political, economic, and governance spheres. Musa Abu Marzuq, the head of Hamas' Political Bureau at this time, expressed flexibility by saying that tactics and policies could change, depending the advantage to be gained while Yassin offered a long-term truce. Modifying its ideology of *jihad* was the only way for Hamas to avoid being perceived as an obstructionist force harming Palestinian society. During this period, Hamas demonstrates that the Charter was "written cleverly and can be interpreted in different ways."[49] This pragmatism was also extended to relations with the PLO.

Following the DOP, Hamas and the PLO diverged even more in their strategic preferences. Cognizant of the mutual dangers of confrontation, they "adopted a strategy of cooperation."[50] This became particularly important during the latter period of Oslo, as the PA accepted increasing responsibility for security in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. Such a responsibility made the threat of intra-Palestinian violence acute. Following the signing of the Oslo II Agreement on September 28, 1995, the PA came under great international pressure to crack down on Hamas in accordance with Article 14.3 of that agreement.[51] Hamas was torn between abandoning its dedication to *jihad* to liberate Palestine and coming into armed conflict with the PA. In response, Hamas developed a policy of controlled, calibrated violence that was formalized in a 1995 agreement with the PLO. The agreement stipulated that Hamas would refrain from attacks against Israel from PA-controlled areas but left open the possibility of attacks from areas remaining under Israeli control. This allowed Hamas to continue using violence as an outlet for popular discontent. It claimed violent acts as retaliation for official or unofficial Israeli actions and thereby continued to demonstrate its strength internally and externally. Such agreements were "a function of internal Palestinian politics"[52] demonstrating Hamas' pragmatism and sensitivity to political factors.

Post-Oslo and Hamas Ascendance to Power

The period from the outbreak of the second *intifada* in September 2000 until the 2006 PA parliamentary elections can be characterized by Hamas' short-lived retrenchment into ideology, and then a return to pragmatism. The Al Aqsa *intifada* helped create parity of popular support between Fatah and Hamas and resulted in Hamas' victory in the parliamentary elections of January 2006. From 2000-2004 there was a "pattern of rising Hamas support paired with falling support for Fatah" that concluded with Hamas receiving 44.45 percent of the popular votes in 2006 compared to Fatah's 41.43 percent.[53] With that, Hamas gained an overwhelming parliamentary majority: 74 seats compared to Fatah's 45. With positive future prospects, Hamas reverted to the maximalist, long-term goal. A number of factors encouraged this retrenchment, including the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the assassination of Yassin, one of its most prominent and flexible leaders. Despite the powerful factors supporting retrenchment, the exigencies of political government once again demanded ideological and policy flexibility incompatible with the long-term goal. Ultimately, due to its need for popular support, Hamas showed remarkable flexibility by shifting back to the short-term objective with regard to *jihad* and Palestine.

During the Oslo process, the prominence of *jihad* in Hamas' ideology and practice was diminished. As soon as Oslo failed and Hamas could defy Fatah outright, it returned to its long-term goal of an Islamic state in all of Palestine via *jihad*. However, as it became increasingly clear that it could not achieve its long-term goal via violence, Hamas' concern for political power forced it to return to the short-term goal of a state in Gaza and the West Bank. Almost from the outset, violence during the second *intifada* reached unanticipated heights. In particular, Hamas demonstrated incomparable lethality. No other Palestinian

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faction "executed as many suicide attacks, or generated as many casualties among Israelis"[54] as Hamas during the *intifada*'s first year. Violence during the *intifada* was characterized by increased religiosity and widespread support for attacks, in particular suicide operations. Hamas ensured a steady stream of volunteers for suicide attacks by giving martyrdom operations a more prominent role, and appealing to potential operatives with religious and economic incentives. Hamas provided financial support for the families of successful suicide operatives and helped funnel the funds of external actors willing to provide similar support.

By 2003 several factors produced the first major sign of flexibility from Hamas: the 45 day, unilaterally declared *hudna*, or truce, starting in late June 2003. Israeli incursions, intensification of targeted assassinations, and increased isolation of the Palestinians by President Bush in the "war on terror" raised pressure on Hamas to unbearable levels. Hamas sustained major damage, especially in Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, and these mutually reinforcing events forced Hamas to reconsider its emphasis on violent *jihad*. Israel was not bound to the *hudna*, so it continued operating against Hamas during late June and August. Unsurprisingly, the *hudna* disintegrated in August 2003 and Hamas returned to violence. Despite its brief duration, the *hudna* was important because it demonstrated that Hamas would act rationally, especially in the face of overwhelming odds and continued military defeats.

> **Hamas' emphasis on violent resistance changed after the parliamentary elections in January 2006**

In January 2004, shortly before their assassinations, the two top Hamas leaders in Gaza, Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, independently offered Israel a 10-year *hudna*. On January 8, Yassin said, "Hamas is prepared to accept a temporary peace with Israel if a Palestinian state is established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The rest of the territories [of] Israel proper will be left to history."[55] Despite opposing the ceasefire in 2003, on January 24, 2004, Rantissi made a similar offer based on the fact that Hamas found it "difficult to liberate all our land at this stage, so we accept a phased liberation."[56] Notwithstanding these unusual offers, Israel assassinated both leaders within a month of each other in March and April 2004. Their deaths had two widely felt impacts. First, Yassin's death created substantial popular sympathy for Hamas; for the first time, Hamas was the most popular movement in Palestine.[57] Second, the loss of Yassin and Rantissi shifted the locus of power to the more extreme leadership of Hamas located outside the Palestinian territories. The effect was another temporary retrenchment into ideology. The external leadership, disconnected and unaffected by conditions and repercussions on the ground in the Occupied Territories, had less impetus to adopt more moderate policies. They continued to advocate violent *jihad* from the safety of Damascus, only lessening their rhetoric with the ceasefire of November 26, 2006.

Throughout the continued violence, the role and need for violent *jihad* changed enormously. Israel's unilateral withdrawal under fire from Gaza in August 2005 reinforced the utility of violent *jihad* both popularly and within Hamas' ranks. However, Hamas' emphasis on violent resistance changed after the parliamentary elections in January 2006. As an elected government, Hamas became a more vulnerable organization. It inherited increased humanitarian responsibilities that increased pressure on the movement, especially as the halt in international aid to the PA and continued Israeli incursions caused widespread suffering. Hamas was no longer a non-state armed group that could evade blame for these circumstances. Further, as the majority party in the PA, Hamas became an easier target for Israeli operations. Hamas gained control over government buildings and institutions with clear locations. Hamas members could no longer hide anonymously among the population to seek safety from Israel. Rather, they became open and obvious targets for retaliatory Israeli operations, especially when directly connected to terrorism. This weakness led to an increase in pragmatism and ideological flexibility.

This shift in status led to a concurrent shift to protect Hamas' personnel: obfuscating language to present a muddled picture of what is and is not acceptable. Leaders continue to refuse to grant Israel recognition[58] and reaffirm their dedication to *jihad*, only offering to "halt their rocket fire into Israel in return for Israel ending its military operations in both the West Bank and Gaza."[59] These statements appear to indicate that Hamas is willing to take some reciprocal steps, but only after Israel acts first. Further, whereas in 1996 Hamas argued that participation in elections would validate the repugnant Oslo process and would mean implicit recognition of Israel, in 2006 Hamas' desire to participate in the political process helped overcome these reservations. Despite participating in 2006, and negotiating with Israel over kidnapped Israeli soldiers using Egypt as intermediary, Hamas remains reluctant to take steps that would formalize this recognition. The farthest Hamas seems willing to go is to offer a *hudna* with the same conditions as those presented

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by Yassin and Rantissi in 2004. In September 2006 Prime Minister Haniyeh offered "a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders and the return of refugees, and the condition will be a truce, not the recognition of Israel."[60]

Hamas' specific political positions on these issues are of less concern to the organization than its role and success in providing social services. As a popular organization, Hamas must retain public support. To this end it sought to ensure the well-being of the Palestinian population. Hamas partially learned this lesson from the Oslo period; Fatah's corruption and inability to provide Palestinians with necessary services created an opening for Hamas to increase its popularity. The recent aid embargo reinforced the importance of continued services. Israel and the international community stated three conditions for a resumption of funding: recognition of Israel, acceptance of previous agreements, and renunciation of violence.

Hamas does not appear ready to overtly forsake its ideology but it is showing flexibility. Resuming the flow of aid is so important that Haniyeh offered "to resign if it would end the crippling Western aid boycott."[61] Negotiations continue over a coalition or technocratic government that would be more acceptable to international donors but Hamas does not seem ready to meet the necessary conditions completely. Popular pressure appears as a major driving factor leading Hamas to treat Israel more like a potential partner rather than a committed enemy and illegitimate state.

CONCLUSION

Hamas' Charter presents rigid ideological views incompatible with the actual situation in Palestine. However, to date, these views have not only proven effective in gaining Hamas strong support among Palestinians, but they propelled Hamas into political power. Presciently, especially for a book published in 1994, Abu-Amr argued that "Hamas's political pragmatism has become more evident as the movement's strength versus the PLO has grown."[62] Since its founding in 1987, Hamas has been unable to strictly adhere to its ideology, specifically its long-term goal of liberating Palestine via *jihad* and establishing an Islamic state. To retain its legitimacy, Hamas adopts pragmatic and flexible interpretations of the justifications underlying this goal. In each of the three periods described above the attendant

domestic political pressures forced Hamas to use this ideology for guidance, but not to drive its policies. During periods of stress, Hamas tends to retrench, but the need for political power and public support have forced it to act pragmatically.

The eventual outcome of Hamas' flexibility is uncertain, but the most important question is if Hamas has reached its limit. Refusing to accept the three conditions of the international community to resume the flow of monetary assistance brought unprecedented suffering to the Palestinian population. Without strong public opposition to force change Hamas is likely stand firm in support of the long-term goal. During Oslo, a reluctant Hamas developed the concept of the short-term goal due to irresistible public support for Oslo. When such overwhelming hope for peace arises again, Hamas will have to find another religious solution to preserve its ideology or risk politically irrelevancy. However, Israel's precondition for resuming final status negotiations requires a permanent modification of Hamas' ideology, including recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence. Reconciling these two needs, where each seems necessarily to precede the other, will be a monumental challenge.

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