
The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas: A Network Perspective

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In the wake of the 11 September attack on the World Trade Center in New York and President Bush's "war on terrorism," it is important to try to understand the cultural, political, and social dimensions of such radical Islamic groups as the Palestinian Hamas. Within political and academic circles in the Western world, it is common to portray Islamic movements in categorical terms that utilize binary classifications that mark real or imaginary social attributes rather than relational patterns.¹ Much of this perception derives from the violence accompanying Islamic religious fervor and the fanaticism marking some of its groups and regimes, raising fears of "a clash of civilizations" and "a threat" to Western liberal democratic values and social order.²

Hamas, an abbreviation of *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement), did not escape the binary perception, and has been described solely as a movement identified with Islamic fundamentalism and suicide bombings. The objectives at the top of its agenda are the liberation of Palestine through a holy war (*jihad*) against Israel, establishing an Islamic state on its soil, and reforming society in the spirit of true Islam. It is this Islamic vision, combined with its nationalist claims and militancy toward Israel, that accounts for the prevailing image of Hamas as a rigid movement, ready to pursue its goals at any cost, with no limits or constraints. Islamic and national zeal, bitter opposition to the

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Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and strategies of violence against Israel have become the movement's hallmark.

However, a close scrutiny of Hamas's roots and its record since its establishment at the outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising (*Intifada*) against the Israeli occupation in December 1987 reveals that, although Hamas has been reluctant to publicly compromise its ultimate objectives, it does not subordinate its activities and decisions to the officially held religious doctrine. Rather, it operates in a context of opportunities and constraints, conflicting interests, and cost-benefit considerations, and is attentive to the fluctuating needs and desires of the Palestinian population and cognizant of power relations and political feasibility.

Moreover, despite the horrifying toll claimed by Hamas's violence, it is essentially a social and political movement, providing extensive community services and responding constantly to political reality through bargaining and power brokering. Along this line, it has been reluctant to adhere to its religious dogma at any price and so has tended to adopt political strategies that minimize the danger of rigidly adhering to principle, doctrine, or ideology, ready to respond or adjust to fluid conditions without losing sight of ultimate objectives.

In this article I will follow the categorical approach and propose a network perspective as a research strategy that may provide a better understanding of the Hamas's modes of thinking, its decision-making processes, and the relationship between its practice and doctrine. I argue that the study of Hamas politics, as well as the politics of other Islamic movements, requires an explicit construction of a more systematic perspective. Thus, in contrast to the categorical perspective, I propose a network approach as an analytical strategy that focuses on social ties and political interactions. This approach's particular advantage is its special suitability for analyzing complex interactions between internally heterogeneous entities. Using it, researchers can analyze more effectively the multiple configurations by which the politics of Hamas and of other Islamic movements are embedded in social and religious connections.

The Categorical Perspective

The categorical perspectives' ontological assumptions stem from a mode of conflict resolution associated with Western political culture, which deviates from the socially embedded conflict mediation devices developed by Middle Eastern communities.³ The categorical approach constantly uses "unnuanced sets of contrasting markers [that] deter awareness of the constant interpretation of social and political networks."⁴ Scholars

holding a categorical perspective typically depict social and political realities as two mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed categories, characterized by “either/or” relations. Furthermore, the categorical perspective depicts social identities, boundaries, and actor’s choices as fixed, stable, and consistent. Also prevalent is the assumption that the power structure is hierarchical, given, and enacted according to formal and unambiguous rules. Characteristically, the categorical classification of Middle East politics and societies utilizes dichotomies such as “state” versus “society”; religiosity versus secularism; urban versus rural; “center” versus “periphery”; “elites” as opposed to “the masses”; Muslim majority, Suni, or Shiite versus Christian minority; traditional versus modern; conservatism versus revolution; tribalism or community versus statehood; radical Islam as opposed to the secular state; and so forth.⁵ The categorical approach underscores, then, inherent dissimilarities between actors. By doing so, it highlights the contrasting elements of the polity. Under this definition of reality there is a strong emphasis on a continuous conflict between parties, which have clear boundaries and well-defined goals.⁶

The categorical perception has received growing criticism, particularly from political theorists and sociologists. Still, this increasingly critical legacy has left us with no explicit alternative perspective.⁷ Anderson⁸ pointed out that a “national community” that is unitary and homogenous is also misleading. As an abstract collective identity, it promotes transcendent reality that is relatively “independent from those persons or groups who perceive and participate in it.”⁹

Moreover, even categorical distinctions such as the divide between rural and urban do not seem to fit the empirical reality.¹⁰ Munson correctly argues that while fundamentalist Muslims reject social modernization as a form of secularization, they do not repudiate economic and technological modernization.¹¹ Hence, the simplistic denotation of “backward Islamism” versus “modernist secularism” serves to blind us to the concrete details of complex reality, where new ideologies and old cultural values are intertwined and blurred.¹²

This categorical discourse has led, moreover, to the selection of units of analysis that seem to fit the binary image. Following that logic, the Middle East was portrayed as a “mosaic made up of distinct peoples, each represented by single, clearly demarcated boundaries, these discrete, static, clearly bounded groups keep their unique identities and cultures while contributing to a larger structure. There is no room for overlap, for gradation, for change.”¹³ Typically, structural functionalists have used this categorical metaphor to depict the cases they studied in terms of the social equilibrium within a “timeless Middle East.”¹⁴

One should mention that in the literature concerning the Arab and Islamic Middle East, there has been a continuous—though rarely explicit—effort to break the binary categorical divisions into a more complex depiction of social reality. Kimmerling and Migdal, for example,¹⁵ demonstrate the plasticity of the Palestinian identity over time, while Layne asserts that in Jordan, the two collective identities of “true Bedouins” and “true Jordanians” are intricately related and “The relationship between the two might be called ‘dialogic’ . . . [where] ‘dialogism refers to the constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others.’”¹⁶ Bassam Tibi illustrates that in the case of the Middle East, subsocietal segmentation leads to the formation of criss-crossing lines of solidarity,¹⁷ while Michael Barnett argues that the political identity of the nation-state in the Middle East and the social identity of pre-existing subsocietal groups were embedded in one another.¹⁸

In this relatively new literature, political conflict does not “resolve,” but rather redefines. States, communities, tribes, and national and religious movements learn to coexist with one another while redefining their operational goals and codes. Nevertheless, the manners in which political relations and social linkages generate the choices of accommodation by various political actors are hardly specified in this literature. To various degrees, it seems that all of these scholars assume that social and political actors belong to opposing groups that are integrated around a common set of core values. Still, people internalize and conform to these core norms, using them as standard obligatory conduct. Situated in various linkages, then, people create and manipulate their own identity.¹⁹

The Network Approach

Our assessment of the categorical approach leads us to make use of a flexible organizational perception, based on the network approach, which may provide a better understanding of the decision-making process and the political conduct of the Islamic movements in the Middle East context. The network approach assumes that organizations are fragmented polities.²⁰ “The idea of a discrete organization with identifiable boundaries,” wrote Morgan, “. . . is breaking downOrganizations are becoming amorphous networks of interdependent organizations where no element is in firm control.”²¹ Thus, the network approach would recognize the importance of institutional interaction, and would focus on the relations of various actors that occur within an interorganizational context of blurred boundaries and on their implications for the processes of exchange and interdependence among the actors.²²

Furthermore, according to the network approach, organizations are a web of distinct but overlapping policy communities. Since each organization is one group of actors among many, none can achieve its goals without the involvement of others.²³ In such a setting, interests are not consistent and homogeneous, but rather heterogeneous, strenuous, and could, in principle, either compete or overlap with one another. In this view, the mode of an organization's action is bargaining and negotiating rather than controlling, reinventing rather than coercing, and steering rather than rowing.²⁴

The advantage of the network perspective stems precisely from its epistemic standpoint. While conventional approaches like "the indexical, the typological, the world-aculturative . . . stress a series of all-too easily hypostatized static pictures of what is actually a process . . .,"²⁵ the network perspective looks beyond the political commonsense issues of stability, legitimacy, control, and hierarchy. The network perspective turns these issues "on their head." It asks how a state, movement, or community can produce conditions to encourage and create a political reality that is based on perceptions of bounded instability, negotiated coexistence, blurred boundaries, and conflicting, competing, and overlapping preferences instead of secure and prolonged stability, fixed boundaries, and consistent preferences.

A comparison of the categorical and the network approaches highlights the differences between the two analytical perspectives and the importance of blurred boundaries and fuzzy categories in the network approach. First, the categorical perspective views conflict as discrete events between clearly demarcated, diametrically opposed groups, having stable and consistent preferences. The network perspective of conflict, on the other hand, delineates that there are overlapping preferences and continuous (often simultaneous and dialectical) relations between conflict and cooperation, of rivalry and collaboration, of antagonism and limited partnership. Because multiple identities are interlinked, and the parties' preferences are crosscutting, there is room for bargaining.²⁶ Furthermore, the network approach does not claim to provide a single discrete answer for a policy problem; rather, the policy continues to be negotiated and renegotiated through processes of endless interpretation and persuasion.²⁷

Second, the categorical approach tends to ignore the potential influence of formal and informal ties among actors, ties that cut across social categories and group boundaries, and the patterns and forms of social relations that affect actors' identities, attitudes, and behavior. By contrast, a network approach views relationships among social actors in terms of competitive and conflictual horizontal and vertical relations.²⁸

Third, while the categorical perspective uses an essentialist reading of cleavages (stemming from a group's attributes or fixed interests), the network approach employs a dynamic and kaleidoscopic image of political cleavages. Moreover, to the extent that social cleavage and ideological dispute involves conflicting loyalties between memberships, especially in a case of "cross-cutting social circles," a restraining affect emerges.²⁹

Hamas's Blurred Boundaries

The preference of Hamas for composite strategies and compromise tactics over an "all or nothing" policy and categorical perspectives is not exceptional in the history of Islamic communities. As Eickelman and Piscatori argue, the boundaries between social, political, and religious duties and preferences are constantly shifting. Thus, political power, religious symbols, and social interests are always located in a particular context and in a nexus of social and cultural relationships.³⁰

The process of finding a workable compromise between the doctrine and practice, ideas and interests, applies with equal force to Hamas. From Hamas's point of view, the utility and advantages of nonbinary policy are quite clear. In fundamentalist movements, support is usually gained at the price of conformity, by publicly renouncing any tactic that could offset the group's normative values. However, as one will notice, many policy devices that Hamas uses have enabled its leaders to manipulate normative rules in a pragmatic fashion. Hamas leaders have been able to move publicly from an "unrealistic" posture of conflict—of total moral commitment to a principle, whatever the cost—toward a more pragmatic bargaining posture, which recognizes that certain norms and interests are shared with the other side and can be used as a basis for a workable compromise.³¹

Indeed, much of Hamas's politics can be explained in terms of its dogmas and practical needs. This interaction is manifested in the tension between fulfillment of the Islamic duty of *jihad* against Israel as the most effective means of political mobilization, reviving the spirit of Palestinian national activism in an Islamic context, and the movement's realistic considerations of political survival, which requires an exchange process among actors that involves an access to a variety of resources.³² Hamas emerged as an Islamic alternative to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during the early months of the first Palestinian *Intifada* of 1988. Invoking a religious vision, political and social goals, and communal action, Hamas challenged the PLO's status as the exclusive political center and sole authentic representative of the Palestinian people. Hamas

espoused an Islamic-nationalist doctrine instead of the PLO's secular nationalism and political program regarding Palestinian statehood and national territory. It is the Islamic ideology that shapes Hamas's political strategy as well as the rules and norms of its envisioned Palestinian state and society.³³

Hamas's origins are rooted in the Muslim Brothers movement, and more specifically in its main institutional embodiment since the late 1970s, the Islamic Center (*al-mujamma' al-islami*) in the Gaza Strip. Formally legalized in 1978 by the Israeli Military Administration, the *Mujamma'* became the base for the development, administration, and control of religious and educational Islamic institutions in the Gaza Strip, under Sheikh Ahmad Yasin's supervision.

The *Mujamma'*'s activities were directed inward, focusing on the long-term goal of reshaping the Muslim community. Its project rested on a large-scale social program to create a network of schools and Qur'anic classes to preach the message of Allah (*tabligh wa-da'wa*). The *Mujamma'* leaders encouraged social activities at both the individual and communal levels conducted in accordance with traditional and Islamic norms.

The PLO's expulsion from Lebanon, following the 1982 Israeli invasion, was clearly reflected in the *Mujamma'* thought and practice. The perception that the PLO was militarily and politically bankrupt apparently induced the *Mujamma'* leadership to contemplate the possibility that it could become a political alternative. Such a radical transformation in the *Mujamma'* strategy necessitated conceptual and structural changes, expressed particularly in actions of a national nature, which meant, in practice, armed struggle against Israel. Already in 1983, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, the founder of *al-Mujamma'*, ordered members of the organization to secretly gather firearms, which were then distributed among selected operatives.

The growing tendency of Islamic youth to undertake violent activities against Israel was reflected in the establishment in 1986–1987 of the Movement of the Islamic Resistance (*Harakat al-muqawama al-islamiyya*), Hamas. The transition to politics and armed struggle represented by Hamas was intended to complement, not replace, the social activities identified with the *Mujamma'*. Nonetheless, Hamas also represented a shift of emphasis in the Islamic movement's strategy, from reformist and communal to political, and from the spiritual life of the individual to national action.

Hamas's effort to secure a dominant public position by committing itself to promote Palestinian national interests, while at the same time maintaining its allegiance to an Islamic vision, generates an acute predicament. The problem, inherent since the movement's establishment,

was sharply aggravated by the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DOP), known as the Oslo accord, which was signed on 13 September 1993, and the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Gaza and Jericho in June 1994. Hamas's awareness of the need to secure its presence and influence within the Palestinian population, often at the expense of competition with the popular PA, necessitated flexibility in its uncompromising attitude toward a settlement with Israel.

Yet, by adopting such a strategy, Hamas runs the risk of losing its standing as the normative opposition to the PLO, thus heightening the danger of friction within the movement and opening itself to manipulation by the PA. Adherence to the dogmatic vision also produces confusion and uncertainty, whereas Hamas's conformity to its stated religious doctrine strengthens its credibility among followers and adversaries alike. However, by taking action that brings Israeli retaliation, it runs the risk of undermining the support of large segments of the Palestinian public.

A close examination of Hamas's decision-making processes shows that they have been markedly balanced, combining realistic considerations with traditional beliefs and arguments, emphasizing visionary goals but also immediate needs. They have demonstrated rigidity within the formal Hamas doctrine while showing signs of political flexibility. Although a permanent peace settlement with Israel was forbidden, Hamas left open the option of an agreement, provided it assumed a temporary form.³⁴ And while Hamas rejected the PLO's right to represent the Palestinian people, it did not exclude the possibility of a political coalition "on an agreed program focused on *jihād*."³⁵

By interpreting any political agreement involving the West Bank and Gaza Strip as merely a pause on the historic road of *jihād*, Hamas achieved political flexibility without forsaking its ideological credibility. Having adopted the strategy of a temporary settlement, Hamas was ready to acquiesce in the 1993 Oslo process without recognizing Israel; to support the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip without ending the state of war or renouncing its ultimate goals; and to consider restraint, but not to give up the armed struggle. Political activity here and now was thus justified in terms of the hereafter. Acceptance of a political settlement in the short run was interpreted as being complementary, not contradictory, to long-term desires.

Hamas's efforts to justify its position are best followed by analyzing its attitudes and policy on the issue of *jihād* against Israel and participation in the PA's institutions, or a temporary peaceful settlement. Its positions demonstrated conformity with the formal Hamas doctrine while showing signs of political flexibility. Patterns of political adjustment in

terms of controlled violence, calculated participation, and negotiated co-existence in the PA's emerging institutions became the main features of Hamas's political conduct.³⁶

Controlled Violence

The Israeli-Palestinian DOP of September 1993 increased Hamas's awareness of the limits of its power on both intra-Palestinian and regional levels. In addition, Hamas's concern about the population's day-to-day interests and immediate needs made it increasingly reluctant to translate its dogmatic vision into practice. Calculated policy based on pragmatic interpretation and negotiated profit/loss considerations rather than on bondage to a stated doctrine and rigid dogma thus characterized its mode of operation. Succinctly expressing the shifting interests and the pragmatic policy on military attacks against Israel in the wake of the DOP, the head of Hamas's political bureau, Musa Abu Marzuk, said that:

[M]ilitary activity is a permanent strategy that will not change. The modus operandi, the tactics, means and timing are conditional on their benefit. They will change from time to time in order to inflict the heaviest damage on the occupation.³⁷

That Hamas's armed struggle was perceived as a means, and not a goal in its own right, was made clear by the movement's leading figures in Gaza. Probably the most outspoken was Mahmud al-Zahar:

We must calculate the benefit and cost of continued armed operations. If we can fulfill our goals without violence, we will do so. . . . We will never recognize Israel but it might be possible that a truce (*muhadana*) would prevail between us for days, months or years. . . .³⁸

It is against this backdrop, and fears of confrontation with the PA, that Hamas leaders repeatedly proposed, in 1995, a conditional cease-fire (*muhadana* or *hudna*) with Israel. The legitimacy of the cease-fire, *hudna*, as a phase in the course of a defensive *jihad* against the enemies of Islam has been widely discussed—and accepted—by both radical and more moderate Islamic scholars since Egypt's President Anwar Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. The concept was justified by historical precedents ranging from the Prophet's treaties with his adversaries in Mecca (the Treaty of Hdaybiyya, 628 C.E.) and the Jews of al-Madina, to the

treaties signed between Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and other Muslim rulers and the Crusaders. The common denominator of these precedents is that they were caused by Muslim military weakness and concern for the well-being (*maslaha*) of the Islamic community, and were later followed by the renewal of war and the defeat of Islam's enemies. In retrospect, these cases of *hudna* were legitimized in realpolitik terms and interpreted a priori as necessary and temporary pauses on the road of *jihad* against the infidels.³⁹

The *hudna* approach found expression in various statements made by Hamas's most prominent leader, Shaikh Ahmad Yasin, during the first *Intifada* of 1987 and the second one of 2000, known as *Intifadat al-Aqsa*. First, Hamas did not rule out the possibility of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, provided that this was considered the first phase toward the establishment of a state in all of Palestine. Second, Hamas was ready to consider international supervision in the territories after the Israeli withdrawal if it were limited in time and did not require direct, clear-cut concessions to Israel. Third, Hamas would reject any attempt to enter into political negotiations with Israel over a peace agreement as long as the Israeli occupation continued; however, Hamas would not exclude such an initiative after a full Israeli withdrawal.⁴⁰ The aim behind the second *Intifada* in September 2000, argued Shaikh Ahmad Yasin, was to set up a Palestinian state in the territories that were seized in the Arab-Israeli War of 1967.⁴¹

Yasin's statements reflected a growing tendency within Hamas, prior to the 1993 Oslo accord, to bridge the gulf between the movement's agreed-on prose of reality while maintaining the poetry of its ideology. By adopting a strategy of neither full acceptance nor total rejection of the PLO's program of political settlement, Hamas was able to justify its position in normative terms, explaining such "concessions" as tactical moves. While a final peace settlement with Israel was forbidden, Hamas left open the option of an agreement with Israel, provided it assumed a temporary form denoting neither peace (*salam*) nor final conciliation (*sulh*).

By interpreting any political agreement involving the West Bank and Gaza Strip as merely a pause on the historic road of *jihad*, Hamas achieved political flexibility without losing its ideological credibility. Acceptance of a political settlement in the short run was interpreted as being complementary, not contradictory, to long-term desires.

As a result of Israel's military operations in the West Bank since May of 2002 (coming in the wake of Palestinian suicide bombing attacks), Hamas's ability to moderate its positions along the lines of a provisional cease-fire with Israel was significantly decreased. At a time when Pales-

tinian public opinion views Israel's military activities as an attempt to re-establish an occupation regime over Palestinian areas, few Palestinian leaders are able to speak the language of reconciliation with Israel—particularly those who are members of Hamas. Nevertheless, based on Hamas's political and operational record, one can expect Hamas to return to its mixed policy once the political process between Israel and the Palestinians resumes.

Calculated Participation and Negotiated Coexistence

Hamas's political strategy of neither official recognition nor total rejection of the PA has been apparent in the movement's internal debate and concrete behavior concerning its participation in the PA's executive and representative institutions. Hamas's survivability and continued growth require access to power and resources. On the other hand, Hamas had a vested interest in minimizing the damage accruing to its political reputation by its participation in the PA, as it might be construed as a deviation from its religious dogma.

Taking into account Hamas's refusal to publicly recognize the PA, involvement in its administrative apparatuses without either an official presence or direct representation would furnish a useful means to gain some benefits from the post-Oslo processes without paying the political cost of endorsement. Moreover, involvement would act as a safety valve for Hamas, reducing the threats to its continued activity and public support.

Indeed, the strategy of participation through unofficial presence dictated Hamas's behavior on the incorporation of its members into the PA's executive bodies. Hamas encouraged its adherents to join the PA's administrative organizations on a personal basis. It also justified this by distinguishing between two perceptions of the PA: as a sovereign political power, but also as an administrative apparatus geared to provide services to the public. While the former image represented political principles and national symbols, the latter was perceived to be instrumental, linked to reality. As a political center committed to enforce exclusive authority that articulated common symbols and collective beliefs, the PA was denied Hamas's legitimacy. However, as an administrative apparatus designated to enforce law and order and provide employment and services to the community, the PA could be acknowledged.

Thus, although Hamas propaganda continued to discredit and delegitimize the PA's leadership, Hamas was careful not to alienate the rank and file within the PA administration. This approach, and the PA's policy of preferring coexistence over confrontation with Hamas, led the

latter, as early as October 1993, to instruct its adherents to refrain from creating a hostile atmosphere against the Palestinian police. On the contrary, police officers were to be encouraged to collaborate in Hamas armed actions against Israel and even to “initiate suicide actions . . . exploiting their possibilities of [available] weapons and freedom of maneuver to support the resistance.”⁴²

Also, Hamas encouraged its members to fill official positions in the West Bank religious establishment, explaining that these were administrative positions, providing services to the community, without bearing representative significance. By reducing the significance of participation in the PA’s administration to the individual level and underlining its executive aspects, Hamas could benignly portray such participation as unofficial, with no political or symbolic meaning.⁴³

Hamas’s willingness to maintain a negotiated coexistence with the PA was reciprocated by the latter on grounds of cost/benefit calculations and realistic considerations of political survival that consist of a process of interdependence involving both parties. True, Arafat sought to weaken and divide Hamas and co-opt it into the PA, but his cautious policy also reflected a preference for dialogue over head-on collision. Since neither side could sustain the price of a full-fledged attempt to eliminate the other, both preferred cautious acquiescence to the other’s existence, rather than risking their public legitimacy in a showdown. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the events of June 2002. In the wake of suicide bombing attacks in Israel and intense international pressure, and following President Bush’s speech calling for the replacement of Arafat, the PA head ordered Sheikh Yasin to be put under house arrest. Yasin’s followers viewed the actions by the head of the Palestinian Authority very gravely and one of his followers claimed that while the Sheikh wanted to advance the cause of *jihad*, the Palestinian Authority “[wants] to prevent Jihad.”⁴⁴ Sheikh Yasin’s response, however, was significantly different, reflecting his understanding of the interdependence between Hamas and the PA and his ongoing attempts to prevent open conflict between his followers and the PA. Yasin described Arafat’s actions as the result of overwhelming pressure because “there is an Israeli side, which is very strong, supported by the American side, which is very strong, and there is the Palestinian side, which is very weak . . . so the Palestinians compromise.”⁴⁵

Structure and Strategies

Like other social movements and political organizations, much of Hamas’s inter- and intraorganizational activity is grounded in its hierar-

chical structure and interpersonal relations. Without sovereignty and political independence, traditional affiliations and loyalties have become critical factors in Hamas's public activities, as they are often based on personal acquaintance, family blood, or physical proximity to or close affiliation with a site of prayer or a religious figure. It is these interpersonal relations that stand up behind the tension between the movement's formal and informal elements, between its religious-national vision and communal needs, as well as the tension emanating from the power struggle between "outside" and "inside" over Hamas's leadership and institutions.

Since the beginning of their activities in 1989, Hamas's "outside" leaders have worked hard to institutionalize the movement's presence in Arab and Palestinian communities in the United States and Europe, especially Britain and Germany. Focusing on Muslim community centers, these efforts have included organizing conventions, issuing pamphlets and publications, and raising money for supposedly humanitarian purposes. The largest center was in Dallas, Texas, and was responsible for publishing periodicals of the Palestinian Islamic movement in North America, such as *al-Zaituna*, *Ila Filastin*, and *The Palestine Monitor*. At the end of 1991, a Hamas center opened in Springfield, Virginia, but both centers were shut down in 1993 when the U.S. government declared Hamas a terrorist organization.

Hamas's organizational structure made the "outside" leaders paramount, and the local leaders were organized informally based on ties of solidarity and traditional attachments. As a local movement, the "inside" Hamas's interpersonal networks and interactions, based on friendship, reputation, and trust rather than on hierarchy, played an important role in building organizational infrastructure and mobilizing resources and public support. Indeed, during its formative period, Hamas was affected less by authoritative, bureaucratic, and vertical relations and a hierarchical chain of command than by group interaction and lateral relations based primarily on solidarity among the participants, self-identification as a collective unit, a common background, and a sharing of basic knowledge and values.⁴⁶

The informal relations within Hamas also determined its organization. Thus, the leaders' success in attracting new members, expanding its popular support, and securing obedience and compliance from its followers depended on personal, charismatic virtues rather than coercive means. The archetypal leader was Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, the founder of Hamas, together with others, such as Ibrahim al-Yazuri, Mahmud al-Zahar, and 'Abd al-'Aziz Rantisi. The ability of these leaders to command both obedience and compliance depended more on persuasive ability and less on coercion, more on the controlled use of symbolic and beneficial re-

wards than on the threat of sanctions and punishment. This pattern of informal activity derived also from the tradition of the Muslim Brothers' movement that emerged in Egypt in the late 1920s and remained aloof from politics and formal state institutions, emphasizing instead education and Islamic scholarship.⁴⁷

However, Hamas's emphasis on mass action to mobilize the people required a structure based on vertical relations and a hierarchical chain of command. Hamas's need for a more formal structure was also dictated by external constraints. Israel's repressive policy led the movement to seek more effective measures to secure its survival and continue its activities, hence its emphasis on discipline, secrecy, compartmentalization, and hierarchy. Interpersonal interactions based on trust and persuasion were no longer sufficient, although they continued to affect relationships in both civil and military actions. One should look here in order to understand why Hamas created an organizational infrastructure based on horizontally and vertically differentiated positions. Vertically, positions are linked to a hierarchical chain of command—instructions go down and compliance reports go up—and are controlled by supervisors with a fixed number of subordinates, each of whom has one clearly identified supervisor to whom he is responsible. Horizontally, various tasks are grouped according to the functions performed for the organization.⁴⁸

Hamas's organizational infrastructure is meant to function in accordance with the principles of bureaucratic hierarchy. It includes internal security, military activities, political activities (protests, demonstrations, etc.), and Islamic preaching (*da'wa*). All four units have separate regional headquarters in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Unlike other Hamas activities, the main role of the *da'wa* is the Islamization of the community by means of social mobilization and religious preaching. The *da'wa* was mentioned in the *Qur'an* (14:46) as God's "call" to humans to find in Islam their true religion. The *da'wa* activities are concentrated around the mosques and include religious, educational, sports, and social activities, as well as the recruitment of candidates for training as members of Hamas. Hamas's educational activities are offered to children and youth from kindergarten through primary and secondary school and all the way to post-secondary education.⁴⁹ Hamas also works closely with graduates of Islamic universities and colleges in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The grassroots activists—young, educated, militant, charismatic figures, often from the lower middle class and the operation military groups—have long had a disproportionate amount of influence and freedom of action in their constituencies. The members of the military apparatus are thus distinctly different from both the "inside" and "outside" political

leaders because of their age as well as their social and professional backgrounds. This discrepancy might help explain the frequent irregularities in Hamas's hierarchical order and even the violations of its official leadership's policies.

Hamas's pattern of decentralized organization and the network nature of its activities are expressed in local initiatives that often contradict the official policy and instructions of the top leadership. This is most strikingly manifested in the dispute between the Hamas's political leadership and its military wing, *'Izz al-Din al-Qassam* units, following the June 2001 cease-fire agreed upon between Israel and the PA after the eruption of the Palestinian uprising against Israel in September 2000. While *'Izz al-Din al-Qassam* units issued a statement in the name of Hamas to stop the fire and declare a truce, Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yasin announced that the statement was issued without its knowledge. In a statement to *al-Majalla* (17 June 2001), Yasin announced that:

Hamas did not declare a truce The political wing, not the military wing draft the politics of Hamas The military wing consists of various groups. It does not have a single command; it has many commands. So we cannot know who issued the statement.⁵⁰

The diminished ability of Hamas's senior leaders to maintain control over the rank and file, and the growing stature of the young local activists, underscore the network nature of Hamas's structure and its decision-making process:

1. Tasks are defined more "through the interaction of [local] members than . . . by the organization's top leaders."
2. Decisions are driven more by "interaction among peers than strictly by hierarchical authority and control."
3. Activities are based more on information from local members than on formal leaders.
4. Lateral communications and consultation among members in different local positions have become more common than reliance on vertical communications between superiors and subordinates.
5. Local activists are committed "to performing tasks and fulfilling responsibilities effectively . . . rather than to blind loyalty and obedience to superiors."⁵¹

Given the absence of clear hierarchical norms, normally so prevalent

in Islamic movements, it is likely that the thrust toward a network structure will widen the gulf between the central leadership and the rank and file, resulting in the local power centers challenging the leaders' moral and political status. Still, one might mention at least two reasons that Hamas managed to avoid an organizational split and structural chaos. First is the PA's policy, which, as a matter of tactics, prefers dialogue and coexistence to a military confrontation with Hamas. Second is the provisional character of the 1993 Oslo accord, which had left unresolved, until the final status talks, key issues such as the Palestinian refugees of 1948 and 1967, the future of Jewish settlements beyond Israel's 1967 borders, Jerusalem, the PA's permanent political status, and the demarcation of Palestinian territory. In addition, Arafat's repeated commitment to establishing an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, has helped bridge part of the gap between Hamas and the PA pertaining to the political goals of the peace process.

Hamas's adoption of a policy of dialogue and coexistence with the PA has also enabled it to perceive its relationship with the PA as an intermediate situation of prolonged tensions and contradictions, to be dealt with by institutional arrangements and normative devices that mitigate the antagonism rather than resolve it. In this respect, Hamas has usually avoided adopting rigid political doctrines about its relations with the PLO, and later with the PA, opting instead for temporary accommodation. Hamas, then, does not live up to its world image of a one-track organization with monolithic, unshakable, fundamentalist interests. In fact, if Hamas were to adopt such an unbending approach, it would be counterproductive, increasing its isolation in the local Palestinian, inter-Arab, and international arenas.

Beyond Hamas: Some Conclusions

As in Hamas's case, most of the activities of the Islamic movement within the Arab states can be described in terms of the network rather than the categorical perspective. True, veterans of the 1980s Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation formed, and often strengthened, the core of radical armed Islamic groups—the Islamic Jihad in Egypt; the Armed Islamic group (GIA) in Algeria; *Hizballah* in Lebanon; the Palestinian Islamic Jihad; the Islamic Army of Aden in Yemen, and the Islamic Jihad in Saudi Arabia—which all categorically reject the existing political order declaring all-out confrontation and armed struggle against the existing political regimes.

Yet in comparison to their social and political activities, violence has

been relatively marginal in the conduct of the Islamic movements in the Arab world, especially those whose origins are rooted in the Muslim Brothers movement. Like Hamas, these movements adopted a network nature of activities relying more on persuasion and less on coercion, on group interaction based on solidarity among the members rather than on vertical relations and a hierarchical chain of command, and on political participation in the political systems, through processes of interaction and exchange of normative-based and utilitarian-based resources among actors, rather than on all-out confrontation. It is this network nature of the Islamic movements' activities that lies behind their policy of continuous bargaining, negotiation, and renegotiation within and vis-à-vis the central governments, instead of pursuing an "all or nothing" strategy to advance an Islamic dogma.

Hamas, like other Islamic movements, tends to be reformist rather than revolutionary, generally preferring to operate overtly and legally unless forced to go underground and use subversive or violent methods in response to severe repression. Islamic movements operating in Arab regimes in which they are tolerated have been willing to accept the rules of the political game and to refrain from violence, as in the case of the Muslim Brothers groups in Jordan and Sudan.⁵² Indeed, during the 1980s and 1990s, the novel phenomenon has been the growing inclination of Islamic movements to participate in their respective political systems, even under non-Islamic regimes. Moreover, this pattern has prevailed despite restrictions, or prevention, imposed by various regimes on the participation of Islamic movements in elections, as in the case of *al-Nahda* in Tunisia, FIS in Algeria, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.⁵³ In this respect, Hamas and other Islamic movements in the Arab world escaped a binary perception of their relations with their ideological rivals and political opponents. They took care not to depict their social and political reality as a cluster of mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed categories, characterized by either-or relations.

The question thus becomes how Islamic movements can forge and encourage a political reality based on perceptions of bounded instability, negotiated coexistence, blurred boundaries, calculated participation, and conflicting, competing, and overlapping preferences instead of a secure and prolonged stability, fixed boundaries, and consistent preferences. A fruitful and constructive investigation, therefore, should not search so much for areas of ideological dispute and normative disagreement, but instead should identify strategies of decision-making and modes of thinking that enable individuals, organizations, and movements to successfully handle potential splits and internal contradictions through struggle over

the interpretation of their political values, social preferences, and religious norms.

Hamas and other Islamic movements in the Middle East provide us with examples of less hierarchical political and social entities and more networked, community-fragmented polities, where significant portions of information flows are horizontal, formal arrangements are minimal, and tacit agreements and antagonistic collaborations are the rule. Hamas, thus, is acquainted with and adaptable to the political world, a world of constant bargaining and power brokering, multiple identities and fluid loyalties—in which victory is never complete and tension is never ending.

Notes

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12. Nazih N. M. Ayubi, "Arab Bureaucracies: Expanding Size, Changing Role," in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 129-149; Nazih N. M. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London: Routledge, 1991); Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, "Social Theory in the Study of Muslim Societies," 18-21, *op. cit.*; Describing the Islamic history of Indonesia and Morocco, Clifford Geertz stipulates that even under conditions of acute social change, people do not necessarily become "secular" in the sense that they "progressively" turn into "religious less mind." On the contrary, Geertz claims, they turn from "religious" to "religious-mindedness," from being a captive of religious conviction to holding a religious belief in one way or another. See Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 61.
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