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Policy Memo 1

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November 2

**Overview of Hamas:**

  Hamas is a Palestinian Islamist militant movement that is also one of the territories two major political parties (Laub 2014). Sheikh Ahmed Yassin founded Hamas founded Hamas in 1987, succeeding the start of the first Intifada, as a local Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood (Laub 2014). The group’s 1988 charter was published a year later, and it exposed the group’s central objectives: to eradicate Israel from what was once British Mandatory Palestine (the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip) and to create an Islamic State in historic Palestine (Laub 2014). To achieve these goals, Hamas has put forth a three-part strategy. First, Hams strives to garner grassroots supporters through their social welfare wing. Hamas has established social service networks. These networks garner local support and provide human and financial recourses for attacks. A second strategy of Hamas is to compete with the secular Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestine Authority. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections and now has control of Palestinian Authority (PA) ministries in Gaza (The World Factbook 2020). The military wing, intertwined with the social and political wing, carries out the last part of the three-part strategy: “guerilla and terrorist attacks that target Israeli citizens and soldiers (Levitt 2006, 8).” Suicide bombings were first employed to sabotage peace five months before PLO leader and Israel signed the Oslo Accords, and have since been their primary military tactic (Laub 2014). The group deems their acts of violence as being acts of God and justifies action as their duty to uses violence to protect the people of Palestine from oppression. In Hamas’ 1987 charter it says,  “God is its [Hamas’] goal, the prophet is its example, the Quran is its constitution, jihad is its path (sabiluha), and death in the path of God is its most exalted wish (asma amaniha)” (Muslih 1999,13). Hamas’ ideology blends Islamic values with Palestinian nationalism and jihad. Today, Hamas is the largest of several militant Palestinian organizations and its military wing is comprised of 15-25,000 fighters (The World Factbook 2020). The group is enlarged through support from other countries, international organizations, and other militant groups in the territory (US Department of State 2013).

**Hamas: A Terrorist Organization**

Although the definition of terrorism is contested, most scholars agree that terrorism entails political motivations, violent actions against non-combatants, and it aims to inflict fear within society (Blakely 2017) (Ganor 2002) (Young 2017). Hamas meets all of these standards of terrorism: they use suicide attacks against Israeli citizens and military to inflict fear in the Israeli government in hopes of achieving their nationalistic goals. Hamas’ attacks are simultaneously politically motivated, violent, target citizens and use fear of attacks to get Israel to act in their favor. These characteristics can be seen in Hamas’ 1995 suicide attack campaign. Hamas temporarily halted suicide operations when the PLO was undergoing agreements with Israel to withdraw from the West Bank. When Hamas thought that Israel was backsliding its agreement, Hamas launched a series of 7 attacks killing 65 people. Once Israel partially withdrew from the West Bank, Hamas ended the campaign (Pape 2003). Hamas' violent campaigns such as the 1995 suicide attacks could technically be considered guerilla warfare if had not involve the killing of innocent civilians (US Department of State 2004). Hamas is a terrorist organization because it does attack innocent civilians in addition to Israeli military and security personnel (Ganor 2002). Guerilla warfare can be very similar to terrorism because both tactics use violence and fear to achieve political goals, but what is different is that Guerilla Warfare targets only security and military personnel. Guerilla warfare abides by the rules of war and does not face as much of a moral dilemma. This might explain why after attacks on civilian targets, Hamas often makes public statements proclaiming that they attacked military targets (Pape 2010). It also might explain why Hamas has to influence the Palestinians that it is okay that they are killing innocent people, “According to our religion it is forbidden to kill a woman, a baby, or an old man, but when you kill my sister, and my daughter, and my son, it is my right to defend them’’ (Haaretz, 1997) (Ganor 2002, 303). Hamas’ members and international supporters such as Syria and Iraq consider Hamas as a national liberation movement and not a terrorist organization (Ganor 2002). Regardless of their ‘ends,’ or political goals, they are using ‘means’ that involve the killing of innocent civilians. In other words, Hamas can be both a national liberation movement and a terrorist organization. Hamas is using violence against innocent civilians to scare Israel and achieve its political goals, and is therefore a terrorist organization.

**Cause of Emergence: Foreign Occupation which Expanded Grievances**

         Many scholars attribute the emergence of terrorist organizations to be linked to effects of foreign occupation (Pape 2010) while others focus on grievances among an identifiable group of people (Crenshaw 1981). Hamas was able to garner support by appealing to people’s grievances that were caused by the occupation and the corrupt Palestinian government. Palestinians have long endured low standards of living, a majority of the population lives below the poverty line of US$2 per day and 11% of Palestinian children under the age of five suffered from malnutrition (UN World Bank Report 2003) (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2011).  Palestinians are in dire need of assistance and Hamas has capitalized on this crisis to advance its own political agenda. Following the June 1967 war, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank fell under Israel’s control and the remaining population, already suffering from a corrupt Palestinian Authority, was subject to new rules and regulations by the occupation. Scholars note that for the first 20 years of Israeli occupation, Palestinians detested the occupation but preferred the economic modernization under Israeli rule to violent resistance (Pape 2005). There were strikes, protests, and other forms of nonviolent resistance that took place. From 1980 to 1995, the number of Jewish people living in the occupied territories increased tenfold. With new Israeli settlers, grievances increased; there were geographic and resource inequities as well as roadblocks and curfews that were set in place to deter Palestinian terrorist operations but also had the same effect on everyday Palestinians (Levitt 2006) (Hafez 2015). Hamas garnered local support by offering a series of social welfare projects that improved education, health, and even funded Hamas members’ families while also teaching people that peoples’ grievances were a result of the occupation. People that supported Hamas did not consider it a terrorist organization but more of a resistance movement that was “fighting injustice and oppression, spreading and defending Islam, and creating a just society through preaching, teaching, and, if necessary, armed struggle or holy war.” Hamas was founded and gained support in 1987 due to their ability to capitalize on the local populations frustrations, triggered by Israeli settlement and the corrupt Palestinian government.

**Emergence: Government’s Inability to Prevent**

Other scholars find that a government’s inability or unwillingness to prevent terrorism is a more crucial focal point when considering how a group emerged (Crenshaw 1981). The establishment of Hamas could be partially linked to Israel’s inability to prevent its emergence due to other, more threatening, political groups in Palestine. In the 1970’s Israel supported anything that might counter Fatah; this was the more secular, revolutionary, and (at the time) violent political party that dominated Yasir Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Miller 2019). Israel believed that Palestinian Islamic groups could serve as a useful counterweight and in an effort to undermine Fatah, Israel allowed these groups a fair amount of freedom to organize in Gaza. In 1979 Israel even recognized an Islamic charity created by Ahmad Yassin, one of the co-founders of Hamas (Miller 2019). Five years later, Yassin was arrested for weapon smuggling and he was assassinated in an effort to stop terrorist attacks. Israel originally considered Hamas to be “a temporary nuisance with no real capacity to present a threat, and with little popular legitimacy,” (Clarke 2017). Israel soon realized that it had greatly underestimated Hamas; by 1993 Hamas was carrying out suicide attacks and by 2006 had won the popular election.

**Adoption of Violence on Organizational Level: Strategic**

         The use of violence in terrorist organizations is often a strategic move by weaker non-state actors against a more powerful democratic government (Crenshaw 1981) (Pape 2003). In 1993 Hamas military wing, Izzadhinal-Qassam, started carrying out suicide attacks to gain advantage over the Israel Defense Forces (Clarke 2017); people of all genders and ages took part in martyrdom missions as they saw suicide attacks as a strategic effort to combat oppression. Sayeed Siyam, a Hamas leader in Gaza explains the adoption of violence when he states “We do not own Apache helicopters ourselves, so we use our own methods...Their assassination policy and the bombardment—all this theater of war inside Palestinian villages and homes—we respond to that by seeking to make Israelis feel the same, insecure inside their homes” (Pape 2005). Without the national and financial strength of Israel, Hamas uses suicide terrorism to even the playing field. Suicide terrorism was cheap, relatively easy to effect, and deadly – it made up for 3% of terrorist attacks but 48% percent of fatalities (Gill 2007). As suicide attacks continued to prove its efficacy it became the preferred tactic for attacking Israel. Hamas and Islamic Jihad are responsible for 79 out of 110 suicide attacks between 1994 and 2003 in Palestine (Pape 2005). Since Hamas was founded in 1987, it has been committed to jihad to gain political leverage.

**Survival:**

While 70% of terrorist organizations do not last beyond the first year, Hamas has been able to survive and carry out terrorist attacks as a result of capabilities, which confirms Young’s hypothesis. Hamas has been very adaptable since its emergence in 1987 as a result of its three-wing organizational makeup that includes: politics, social networks, and militarization to carry out its Palestinian nationalist goals. Blurring the lines between political activism, charity, and terrorist attacks, Hamas uses its political and charitable organizations as support networks to carry out terrorist operations (Levitt 2006). Hamas political leaders and social welfare organizations are actively involved in terrorist activities, they are not mutually exclusive. Hamas uses the mosques, playgrounds, and hospitals as meeting places or locations to store explosives. Many of Hamas’ resources, both the social welfare networks and the material resources such as guns and explosives, are often funded by Dawa organizations. There are a flow of funds that comes from The Union of Good, which are “genuine Islamist charities and Hamas organizations fronting as legitimate charities by states like Iran and Saudi Arabia” (Levitt 2006, 8). The Union of Good is an umbrella fundraising organization that links various charities together to transfer and receive funds in a less direct manner. It is estimated that Hamas gets tens of millions of dollars from this organization (US Department of the Treasury 2008). The group's lifespan is expanded because of its increase in GDP, which also gives them more resources (Young 2014). The blurry lines between terrorist attacks and charity to aid the poverty in Gaza and the West bank leads to increased financial support for Hamas. Hamas is incredibly pragmatic and covert which is then aided by international support.