**Continued Perseverance: What Causes HAMAS to Stand Despite Constant Opposition**

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Since the war of 1949, Israel has faced constant opposition. For over 60 years various forces in the Middle East have refused to accept Israel's statehood. The removal of the Palestinian people from their homeland, as well as the continued failure to accomplish a two-state solution, have been held to be the main reasoning behind such opposition. Subsequently, it has been argued that a two-state solution would end the conflict. This would be true if the afore mentioned reason is, indeed, the main motivation behind the opposition. If the opposing forces aren't driven by the desire for a peaceful solution, it could be concluded that a peaceful solution may not put an end to continued harassment.  In order to analyze this further, an examination of one of Israel's most reluctant and forthright antagonists is required. In order to answer this, we shall be examining the non-state organization *Hamas*.

Hamas was chosen not only for its declared hatred for the state of Israel, but also for its resilience despite heavy Israeli retaliation. In spite of having little military success, in casualty comparison, Hamas continues to directly oppose the Israeli forces. In addition to being good for analyzing Hamas in regards to Israeli politics, we also see it being good for analyzing terrorist organizations in general. By studying Hamas, we will be able to get a better understanding of modern day terrorism. By looking at what caused Hamas to come into political power, we can gain insight into the modern drive behind certain terrorist groups and their supporters. In order to do this, we must first look at the information we have on Hamas, as well as other linked information, in order to bring further understanding.

**Literature Review**

The main objective of Hamas has been made clear by their own charter and confirmed by multiple sources (Euben and Zaman, 2009; Tamimi 2007; Cronin 2002; Burleigh 2009; Rabbani 2008). The origin of Hamas is understood to be an offshoot from the earlier established Muslim Brotherhood as well as the result of the unfortunate backstory of Hamas' founder Ahmad Yassin. Due to the 1948 Israeli-Palestinian war Yassin was forced to flee from his home and take refuge in the Gaza strip with his family. Due the consequential results of the numerous Israeli wars, Hamas' established goal is to see to the complete removal of the Israeli people and the restoration of the area known as Palestine to the Palestinian people. In order to achieve that goal, Hamas has participated in various acts of aggression against Israel and any that are considered a threat to the cause. With the backing of various entities, Hamas has been able to establish itself as a very powerful political entity. With Arab states like Iran and Saudi Arabia supporting them, it's not hard to see how Hamas has continued to maintain its power.

Tamimi's book, *Hamas: A History from Within,* gives particular details of the causes and circumstances that allowed Hamas to form and come into power. His book emphasizes how much of an effect childhood circumstances as well as education shapes normal citizens into creating organizations that will later be branded as terrorist organizations. This shows us that those within and in charge of these groups are not necessarily savage killers or mentally unstable criminals. It shows that most are merely average citizens that have been affected by bad circumstances. When reading Hamas' mission statement, as it is written in the books *Princeton Readings in the Islamist State* and *Confronting Fear: A History of Terrorism,* It is clear that they were not written by goalless criminals but by educated strategists. Their statements are written in

a manner that would encourage recruitment as well as give good justification to their cause. It is

because of such well-said words, that nations and people can justify their support for Hamas.

Meir Litvak, in his piece *The Islamization of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The Case of*

*Hamas*, It is argued that greatest driving force behind the efforts of Hamas is the emphasized

religious aspect (Litvak 1998). By having a religiously drawn motivation, Hamas can maintain

loyal membership as well as provide a means of justification. Through the constant "us vs. them"

mindset, Hamas is a group that attempts to gain and maintain support through the establishment

of a common enemy. Hamas has been able to gain momentum and durability through the

insinuation that argues that Hamas' enemies are a threat to all Muslims. Naturally, this

motivation fails to convince all Palestinians that Hamas is truly beneficial for all Muslims. Due,

to differing ideological interpretations of Islam as well as differences in governmental

enforcement tactics not all Palestinian Muslims back Hamas. This can be seen through the piece

by Rema Hammami in the book called *Political Islam* (Beinin 1997). In this piece, a distinct

issue regarding Hamas and their stance on women and the wearing of the hijab is addressed.  It

illustrates the point that not all Palestinians regard Hamas as the best governing entity or even a

good governing entity. It helps to establish the point that Hamas' greatest support cannot be from

the united support or backing of the Palestinian people. Which excludes it from being the reason

for Hamas' continued endurance.

Mouin Rabbani's second interview with Hamas leader Khalid Mishal, gives us direct

insight into the current regimes mindset and attitude. It expresses the reaction of the leadership in

regards to the results of the 2006 electoral victory and gives Mishal's explanation for such a

victory. It has been argued that such a victory has made Hamas very powerful and even caused

the enemies of Hamas, like Israel and the U.S., to view Hamas as more of a threat then it already

was considered to be. This, as well as other points, are argued in Charles Enderlin's book *The Lost Years*. His book argues that Hamas' acquisition of power could have been avoided. In addition, Enderlin blames Hamas' sudden rise to power on the poor actions and lack of effort on the part of the Israeli government and international community; especially the United States. Enderlin shows how the response on part of the Israeli government and the misguided focus of the international community concerning Israel-Palestinian issues produced the Hamas' rise to power. Both Rabbani and Enderlin discuss the political process of Hamas in regards to the Palestinian 2006 election. Both elaborate on the core factors that allowed Hamas to take control from the previous faction "Fatah". Due to the various divisions amongst Fatah members, Hamas was able to take over most of the key positions in government. Such a victory as well as the continued backing by the Iranian government could be the main contributing factor to Hamas' endurance.

By looking at the data already gathered regarding terrorist organizations, specifically religiously motivated terrorist organizations, we compare Hamas to the currently established deductions concerning such groups. Isaac Cronin's book, *Confronting Fear: A History of Terrorism*, gives us a small general argument concerning Religious terrorism. Yet, like most other sources, urges the examination of groups on an individual basis (Cronin 2002). Cronin references similarities concerning the current trend of religious terrorist groups, but further elaborates through excerpts from primary sources regarding terrorists groups. Michael Burleigh also attempts to establish key principles regarding religious terrorist groups in his book, *Blood and Rage: A Cultural History of Terrorism* (Burleigh 2009). In truth, both Burleigh and Cronin only focus on Islamic based terrorism of modern times, this makes their positions more narrowly tailored regarding generalities about terrorism.

**Methodology**

The method used for conducting this study will be qualitative. By using the information available, this study will attempt to establish a particular conclusion concerning the topic before us. In using this method, analysis shall be conducted on the various documents concerning this topic. Content and Document analysis allow us to take the conclusions and data at hand and create either a new or pre-existing conclusion based upon the combined information. By understanding the information that others have found, we can determine what such data is really telling us.

**Analysis**

Though all this information mentioned above is extremely informative, regarding there possible driving force that keeps Hamas moving forward. Many would like to argue religious commitment is what has kept them moving forward. However, other religiously motivated groups have significantly decreased activity and lost support due to heavy casualties and constant bombardment. The prime example of this is Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda, having faced the assassination of its leader, the loss of several of its members and constant bombardment from the United States, have been suffering from a constant decline in support and activity. Yet Hamas, having suffered the loss of its leader, the loss of several of its members and constant bombardment from the Israeli Defense Force, has continued to gain support and is still quite active. Both of these groups are have strong religious motivations and both have faced heavy bombardment. However, Hamas' political status has increased while Al-Qaeda has declined.

In addition, as I have already previously mentioned, many Muslims object to Hamas' interpretation of Islam. The truth of the matter is, Islam is used primarily as a way of legitimizing their goals and right to power. This tactic is similar to the Saudi Arabian leaders and the

Wahhabis clergy. It is the consensus of multiple scholarly sources that the Saudi and Wahhabis partnered with each other in order to stay in power. The Saudi would support their Islamic interpretation, if the Wahhabis interpretation legitimized their power claim. Having taken place in 1744, the concept of using Islam to legitimize political power is not new, and has been used by various terrorist groups throughout the years. By using Islam as a way to recruit members, religious terrorist groups insure that their members will remain 'religiously' loyal.

While Al-Qeada's tactics have, ultimately, lead to their decline, Hamas' tactics have led to an increase in power and support. Ultimately, this is the difference between the two groups and the reason that Hamas has continued to endure. Hamas continues to endure because its methods, no matter how costly, have led to their success. We have to remember that terrorist organizations are ultimately political groups. That being the case, the ultimate goal is power and the accomplishment of one's political goals. As noted above, Hamas ultimate goal is to have the very presence of Israel completely removed from the region. Despite the difficulty of such a goal, Hamas' efforts have been making such a goal more attainable.

Though Hamas has yet to gain the ability to directly accomplish its main desire, the success it has had over the years have been steps forward toward such goals. Naturally, that which constitutes success must be established. The greatest success of Hamas so far is the electoral victory they gained in 2006. Such a success granted them a political legitimacy that allows them to be viewed in a different light. Another more recent success, has been the use of the media, to put the Israeli forces in a bad light. By using such tactics Hamas has made it easier for others to increase support for Hamas' cause and retract support for Israel.

It is safe to assume that Hamas' victory in the in the 2006 PLC elections was not only a success but its greatest achievement. By winning that many seats, Hamas established its

legitimacy and sealed its continued endurance. By legitimizing themselves in a political position of power, they were granted the legitimacy of the state. Ultimately, this is what has given Hamas its current strength to endure. In truth, Hamas isn't merely driven by its religious and military agenda, but primarily by its political agenda. Hamas wants power, and now that they have tasted such power, it will be very difficult to get them to give up their political agenda.

Hamas' electoral victory gave Hamas a more political footing. As Khalid Mishal suggested in his second 2008 interview with Mouin Rabbani , If Hamas didn't participate in that election, the legitimacy of their tactics would been questioned even worse than they were having achieved electoral victory(Mouin 2008). He expresses how much more difficult it would have been for Hamas to maintain its support if it decided not to participate in the election. By participating in the election Hamas was able to survive the complexity of Palestinian politics. Having to compete with political groups Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA). It has been argued that U.S. and Israeli's bombardment on Fatah, weakened them to a state that allowed Hamas to rise to win the election and rise to power. In Enderlin's *The Lost Years* It is shown that while Israeli efforts were focused against Fatah, Hamas took hold of the opportunity to gain political power. Due to the various efforts of Israel, Fatah was in a weakened state. Hamas used such a time to push Fatah out of power and replace it. U.S. and Israeli forces underestimated Hamas' political ability and, subsequently, allowed Hamas to secure its political power. Doing this allowed Hamas to become less of a terrorist organization and more of a political party.

Due to the western view and labeling, Hamas' true nature is seen as irrational and unpredictable. In truth, Hamas is no different from most political parties of the Middle East. It is often forgotten that, Hamas is but an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Because of this, their goals are often attributed to simply being that of military tactics. In truth, Hamas seeks the

political power that would allow them to establish a legitimacy that would insure their long term survival. By shifting from mere jihadist tactics to political strategy Hamas has found a way to hold on to power. The organization has evolved from using only small guerilla tactics and to political warfare.

Due to the effect that the media has on people's opinion, one must be careful about the way one is being perceived. Most people except the fact that the media can provide strong pressure for the support or disdain toward a group. Realizing this, both Israel and Hamas decided to use social media as a means of gaining support and advancing their causes. In a PBS article by Jenny Xie, we are made aware of the various posts and tweets used by Hamas and Israeli forces. By posting attack strategies, death tolls, victim photos, and more during the 2012 confrontation, both groups engaged in relevant media warfare. Both sides have realized the value of using the media. However, recently, it is Hamas that has benefited the most from it.

Hamas and Israel's most recent confrontation has shown just how effective the media can be. During the 2014 confrontation, the civilian death didn't necessarily make Hamas look better, but it made Israel look terrible. According to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 71 Israelis were killed, while 2,131 Palestinians were killed. When the conflict was taking place, the large variation on in death tolls was a constant subject in the media. Additionally, media coverage on the amount of property damage has also been intense. It is unclear as to whether this was intended effect of Hamas. Though some media outlets have suggested, that Hamas used civilians as "human shield" in order bring about such a result, the truth behind such reports are uncertain.

Do to the truth of the media reports Israel's reputation has faced heavy scrutiny.  It is true that some media reports leaned more to the Israeli benefit, but it was the one's the benefited the

Palestinians that had the greater effect.  It was because of such reports, that certain actions toke place. Though both sides are being investigated for war crimes, we can see that Israel has lost the most. While many more countries clearly opposed to Hamas, Israel has generally maintained support from the west. However, when it came to the vote regarding the investigation, only the U.S. vetoed. While Hamas has not gained any support, Israel has lost some.  For Hamas, a loss for Israel is a win for Hamas and a step toward their ultimate goal.

While Hamas' reputation has not necessarily been bolstered directly, the support for the Palestinian people in general has been significantly bolstered. After the conflict donors pledged 5.4 billion dollars in aid to help the Palestinians. The recent conflict between Israel and Hamas created a greater sympathy toward the Palestinian people.

**Conclusion**

By having such successes Hamas has been able to see past the many casualties and endure.  Ultimately, Hamas has endured because it has been dealt with the wrong way and underestimated. Now that they have tasted legitimate political power and seen how a military disadvantage can become a political benefit, they are harder than ever to stop. Having been voted in by the democratic process, it is difficult for their position to be completely discredited. And by using the death toll, it is difficult for others to justify their support for Israel.  If Israel wants to undermine Hamas, they need to attack them politically as well as militarily. If Israel could find a way to turn Hamas' supporters against it. The Palestinian people would keep Hamas from gaining power and eventually cause it to diminish. However, If Hamas continues to have success in its efforts, it will continue to progress toward its ultimate goal. In addition, Israel opposition will give greater support to Hamas and ensure its continuance. Support is given to those that are the most successful.

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