

Has Hamas' Progressive Terrorism Tactics Evolved Past Traditional Counterterrorism Measures? An Analysis of a Means to an End for the Terrorist Organization Hamas

John McClure
Political Science/International Relations
Utah Valley University
Orem, UT 85048
John.McClure@uvu.edu

Abstract

Patterns have shown that terrorist groups often follow a model set forth by their predecessors. Terrorist groups display a kind of contagion effect and are designed with the lessons of its predecessors or contemporaries (Friedman, Harper, and Preble, 2010), but its method and direction often change. This makes the stratagem for counterterrorism somewhat routine to develop based on predictable actions set forth by early terrorist groups. Yet as these groups evolve the US and Israeli strategy for counterterrorism has to evolve with each individual terrorist organization. Terrorist groups often evolve from the initial tenets established in its nascent stages. This is evident within the terrorist group Hamas. There have been several catalysts in Hamas's shift in direction including: 1) Response to the Oslo Accords, 2) Network Technology, 3) Integration into the Political process. Studies show how this shift has begun to lead to its beginning stages of its political legitimacy, and that traditional counterterrorism methods are ineffective toward Hamas. (Rabbani, 2008) These findings show that an offensive approach only emboldens the group's terrorist tendencies; and that traditional approaches to successfully implement countermeasures and predict pathways of dissolution of terrorist activity are ineffective.

Key Words: Hamas, Oslo Accords, Political Legitimacy, Pathways of Destruction, Network Technology, End Strategy, US, Israel

Seven Pathways of Destruction

To evaluate the behavior and potential demise of Hamas, the predetermined means to an end need to be defined; and reasons why their application to Hamas do not apply also need to be addressed. In the book *Terrorizing Ourselves*, authors Friedman, Harper, and Preble discuss seven pathways of endings for terrorist groups which have been accepted as measurable and predictable means to an end for terrorist organizations. Through the evaluation of the application of these models regarding Hamas, it is apparent that different outcomes arise from their application. Hamas has shown to be somewhat resistant to the seven pathways in which terrorist groups dissolve.

The pathway of Military repression and agreement are not applicable to Hamas. The reason is that Hamas is still very much an operational organization. During the first Intifada in 1987 Hamas emerged as an organized militant group of Jihadis. This group, through an eruption of violence had set its sights on ending the Jewish rule of historic Palestine as well as occupied areas in the West Bank and Gaza. Its movement gained traction as not only a militant

Has Hamas Progressive Terrorism Tactics Evolved Past Traditional Counterterrorism Measures?

organization but political, social and cultural as well. (Byman, 2011) Counterterrorism measures on the part of Israel and concessions between Hamas and other Palestinian warring factions would often quell violence and give the appearance of a lull in terrorist activity, yet with the second Intifada suicide bombings coupled with the implementation of network technology enhanced the amount of bloodshed as well as the support of the Palestinian majority. (Byman, 2011) Throughout two intifadas and well into the 2010s, Hamas remains intact and organized. Another reason is that even though their overall demeanor has changed, sign of alignment to end its terrorist activities have not yet surfaced.

In the pathway of destruction of leadership, Hamas does adhere to the criteria. In 2005, Hamas won 76 out of 132 seats in parliament. (Berman 2009) In this case, rather than merely centralizing a terrorist leadership and creating a vulnerability, Hamas spread out its power within parliament and at the same time started its path toward legitimacy as more than just a militant wing. (Herzog, 2006)

In the pathway of failure to transition between generations, Hamas also evades this roadblock. The ideology of Hamas stems from deep rooted Muslim teachings. Hamas adopts the ideology of a complete liberation of Palestine brought on by the moral obligation of all capable Muslim men to take up arms against those who seek to impede this outcome. (Berman 2009) With this ideology in place, it is not likely that Palestine will run out of Muslim nationalists any time soon.

The pathway of achievement of the cause also does not apply for obvious reasons. In order for Hamas to reach its ultimate goal, Israel would have to secede all of its occupied land and become refugees once again. Israel still exists and the Palestinians are still not liberated from their presence.

The pathway of negotiations is a contradiction. As of yet, Hamas negotiations have only increased the power in which they hold. This is evident in their presence in a parliamentary position.

The pathway of military or police intervention has been attempted but only to exacerbate the terrorist activity. Israeli police and military have been forcibly combating the terrorist attacks coming from Hamas, only to find that retaliation only increases the conflict. For the same reasons as the generational transitions, the lack of popular support is also not a concern for Hamas. Muslim nationalists living in Palestine that hope for liberation of their land, are seldom in short supply.

As for the pathway of reorientation, Hamas has seen a transition into politics as well as combat. Though a transition was witnessed, it has not halted the terrorist activity. In 2005, Hamas sought to take control over Parliament by running for its seats. The elections proved to be most fruitful for Hamas. Hamas won 76 out of 132 seats, and another 4 seats were given to supporting independent candidates. A division amongst Fatah candidates left holes wide open for Hamas to fill. Many members of Fatah were under speculation of corruption and Hamas used this speculation to gain legitimate political support. (Zweiri, 2006)

Technological Evolution of Hamas

Hamas has also evolved into areas of media and network technology to enhance their support and further their ability to operate freely and maintain the illusion of legitimacy for its terrorist attacks. "By adopting various network technologies, various terrorist organizations have been able to advance their recruiting techniques, communications, training, planning and targeting, and lastly, propaganda and persuasion." (Gray and O'Neil, 2011) This evolution of Hamas in the area of network technology and media strategy is evident with its strong presence on the internet. Hamas has streamed videos and photographs of horror and mistreatment of Palestinians to further promote their agenda and gain not only supporters but sympathizers as well. (Hoffman, 2006) These images project Hamas to a level of martyrdom that could not have been predicted during the period of the first Intifada. Over twenty years later and this terrorist organization has not only evolved into a political presence from a militant one, but its sympathy and visibility is growing in quite a viral sense due to these technological advancements. This new evolution of terrorism only feeds to the difficulty of adapting and applying strategic measures to counter Hamas' looming terrorist threats.

Response to the Oslo Accords

It is now established that Hamas does not fit into the traditional terrorist organization category. Its roots lie in that of a public welfare institution braced in the Muslim pillar of charity for fellow brothers. (Berman, 2009) As it evolved from a support organization under the radar of its Israeli oppressor, they began to take up arms. After numerous terrorist attacks and two intifadas, Hamas faced yet another hurdle to its liberated holy land, the Oslo Accords. The Oslo Accords and their threat to Hamas' reclamation of land was the defining moment in their transition into the world of politics. The Oslo Accords served as a catalyst that would project Hamas into the political arena and it is in this arena where Hamas starts to distance itself from being a major terrorist organization, into becoming a major player within Palestinian politics and roles of leadership. This role of leadership does come with a price though. With the new role of leadership, comes the cost of its radical actions, and herein lie Hamas' pathway to an end of terrorism. "There is ample evidence that participation in an electoral process forces any party, regardless of ideology, to moderate its position." (Herzog, 2006) This statement is the prelude to Hamas' introduction into politics. For a group that has so often embraced violence, Hamas' aggressive campaigning and ironic acceptance of the democratic process have put it in a position of governance. Where comparative analysis points to the realization that this may put an infamous terrorist organization in a position to exploit their new found power to further justify their acts of violence and give credence to the extraction of the Israelis from the Palestinian state, many academics and political scientists feel that the spotlight given to Hamas will force their hand into a legitimate role. (Herzog, 2006)

Democratic Pacification

Several indicators show that this transition into politics and into a democratic process have in fact begun to quell Hamas' military actions and increase their legitimate stance amongst the Palestinians. The first indicator is its separation between its political and militant wings.

Has Hamas Progressive Terrorism Tactics Evolved Past Traditional Counterterrorism Measures?

Though Hamas does not have an explicit separation between these two groups, Hamas has made the transition into recognizing both an internal leadership within the Palestinian state and an external leadership outside, primarily in Damascus. (Herzog, 2006) This shows a concession of power a more realistic approach to a peaceful resolution to Palestinian conflict. Another indicator of the transition of Hamas into a role of legitimacy was Hamas' platform of reform and good governance rather than stressing ideological struggle. (Herzog, 2006) One more indicator of Hamas' transitory position is its willingness to engage in elections and enter the Palestinian Legislative Council, an institution born from the Oslo peace process, which the group has long rejected; its acceptance of a temporary truce with Israel; its expressed willingness to consider a longer cease fire should Israel withdraw its 1967 borders; and various statements by Hamas leaders that exhibit flexibility. (Herzog, 2006) These indicators show a side of Hamas that illustrates a pathway to the end of a terrorist organization that creates its own category. Through a creation of legitimacy from within the Hamas organization, it has effectively started on the path to an end of terrorism. Though it seems that Hamas will effectively end its own terrorist group, the fact remains that Hamas is still very real and very much involved with terrorist activities. How do we as an international community deal with this source of terrorism? And for a nontraditional terrorist organization, will traditional counterterrorism measures be effective?

Non-Traditional Counterterrorism Measures

One answer to the Hamas conundrum seems to be to just let Hamas run its course. It is a dangerous terrorist organization, but studies from both academics and policy makers show a trend of pacification from within. Social Scientists studying Hamas as a political organization tend to conclude, on the basis of analysis of past behavior, that Hamas' penchant for pragmatism enables it, in principal, to adapt a peace agreement. (Gunning, 2004) This peace theory has been accepted by many academics. The basis that Hamas is too incredibly deep rooted to eradicate, but that it does have the capability to modify its demands has been well received. This being said, what has been the international response to this theory, and who amongst the major international actors subscribes to this notion of a peaceful Hamas? The answer is mixed, and leads to the discussion of international practices when dealing with a terrorist organization that now consists of two bodies, one military, and the other political.

Both the British government and British social scientists have been diligent in the promotion of convergence and a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. In the past it has been one of the first advocates for the academic evaluation of Hamas and their peaceful tendencies. As of late though, pressure from the EU has caused a shift in this mindset, and Britain along with the US are focused on Hamas' glaring position on the list of terrorist organizations. (Gunning, 2004) Both the US and Israel feel that in order to establish peace, Hamas must be eradicated. Official Israeli policy advocates not only the destruction of the armed elements of Hamas, but also the eradication of the entire organization. (Gunning, 2004) This is where both the US and Israel fall short. Neither side views Hamas as a separate organization divided into political and military. They only view Hamas as a terrorist threat that needs to be eliminated in order to reach a peace. In order to deal with Hamas effectively, the US will have to not only encourage its policy makers, but Israel and the UN as well, to view Hamas as both a terrorist organization with deep seeded roots in the Muslim faith, and as a legitimate political entity with the agenda of the development of civil liberties and the promotion of social welfare. In turn, Hamas will also have

to continue to separate itself politically and militarily to the point where there is no association between the two divisions.

Traditional inefficiency

The general approach to Hamas so far has been pre-emption, deterrence and burnout. (Friedman, Harper, and Preble, 2010) These are counterterrorism measures based on a North American model that have appeared to sufficiently eradicate terrorist organizations. (Gunning, 2004) This has proven ineffective for two reasons. The first reason is that deterrence and pre-emption are most effective when applied to a group who is suffering from burnout. Burnout is when a terrorist organization suffers a decrease in members of the group. (Friedman, Harper, and Preble, 2010) As Hamas derives its members from an area of the world rich in young men dedicated to the ideology of Hamas, and a society that often supports the value of terrorist attacks, this falls short of its task. The next reason is a decrease in general political popularity in a terrorist organization will generally open doors for deterrence and pre-emption to be more effective. (Gunning, 2004) As Hamas has gained political momentum and obtained numerous seats of power and influence within Palestine's parliament, this again falls short of an effective strategy. With counterterrorism strategies of deterrence and pre-emption not working effectively, it makes sense that in order to approach this problem of terrorism stemming from Hamas, one must split Hamas up into two separate categories, one political and one military, and deal with each individually and accordingly. When one only attacks one aspect of Hamas without addressing the other, inefficiency is inevitable. In an interview with Khalid Mishal, a Hamas Chief, he states "Hamas does undertake political activity. As I explained, ours is a comprehensive movement that has combined military and political activity. Our vision is to combine them without focusing exclusively on either. Resistance is a fundamental part of our strategy to end the occupation and reclaim our land and rights, but this strategy also includes political and popular action, media work, and diplomacy. We support a program that mobilizes all our capabilities in a coherent and comprehensive way." (Rabbani, 2008) As one can gather from this statement, without approaching Hamas as both a political and military organization simultaneously, rather than one sole aggressive terrorist group, counterterrorism measures will prove to be inadequate.

Policy Recommendations

To end the Hamas terrorist organization the approach will need to involve pressure not just from a military standpoint, but also from a political aspect. If Hamas loses their legitimacy and or their popular support in the democratic process, this will leave them more vulnerable to more traditional counterterrorism strategies. Going back to 1996, when Hamas gained popularity in the political arena, and transferred their power into parliament, they had six major platforms that they addressed in order to gain their seats. These six platforms were: corruption, negotiations with Israel, the use of violence, Jerusalem, refugees, and borders. (Zweiri, 2006) If these six platforms in which Hamas built their legitimacy, were stripped out from beneath them, then their popularity would surely dwindle and the pathways to the end of terrorism that were not applicable before, suddenly apply to this terrorist group in a more traditional sense. For example, if international focus were shifted equally to Hamas's terrorist actions and to their parliamentary practices, where they are shown to be just as corrupt as those they replaced, then the pattern of

Has Hamas' Progressive Terrorism Tactics Evolved Past Traditional Counterterrorism Measures?

terrorism ending with loss of popular support as stated in chapter one of *Terrorizing Ourselves*, will surely come to fruition. (Friedman, Harper, and Preble, 2010) Once popular support is lost, then the floodgates for deterrence and certainly diplomacy open and these become more viable options to exacerbate this means to a political end. With the constituency no longer backing a terrorist organization, the political legitimacy begins to fall apart, in which case military and police action become counterterrorism practices of a more traditional sense that would become a more timely play by opposing forces. By attacking the political credibility first, all the while maintaining a watchful eye on the military actions of Hamas through means of police activity, the process of counterterrorism toward Hamas would play out with improved efficacy.

One more approach to an end strategy of Hamas' terrorist actions would be to let Hamas continue on their given path, and continue to seek a bifurcated existence in that area while maintaining a level of security that deals not only with the aggressive and sometimes unpredictable evolution of an unconventional terrorist organization but addresses its seemingly less threatening tactics such as technology and media. It is safe to assume three things about Hamas: the first is that they have no shortage of a religious extremist following, the second is that they have developed over time an even stronger political base and a popular constituency through a democratic process, the third and most important assumption about Hamas is that there has been a drop in both violence and suicide bombings that coincide with their political involvement. With these three assumptions encapsulating a history devoted to the Liberation of Palestine, it is safe to say that if Israel, the US, and other interested parties within the international community would promote a systematic series of relatively minor concessions toward Palestine over time, Hamas would continue to move closer to point of existence where traditional counterterrorism measures would begin to gain more traction.

References

- Berman, Eli. *Radical, Religious, and Violent*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2009.
- Byman, Daniel. *A High Price: Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Freidman, Benjamin H. , Haprer, Jim, Preble, Christopher A. . *Terrorizing Ourselves*. Washington, DC The Cato Institute, 2010.
- Gray, David. O'Neil, Michael S.. "Islamic Terror Networks Implementation of Network Technologies." *Global Security Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 3, pp 41-51. Summer 2011.
- Gunning, Jeroen. "Peace with Hamas? The Transforming Potential of Political Participation." *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 2 , pp 233-255. Mar. 2004.
- Herzog, Michael. "Can Hamas Be Tamed?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2, pp 83-94. Mar.-Apr., 2006.
- Hoffman, Bruce. *Inside Terrorism*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Rabbani, Mouin. "A Hamas Perspective on the Movement's Evolving Role." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp 59-81. Summer 2008.
- Shikaki, Khalil. "Peace Now or Hamas Later." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 4, pp 29-43. Jul-Aug 1998.
- Tamimi, Azzam. *Hamas, a History of Violence*. Northhampton, Massachusetts: Olive Branch Press, 2007.
- Zweiri, Mahjoob. "The Hamas Victory, Shifting Sands or Major Earthquake?" *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp 675-687. 2006