



HAMAS: “GLOCAL” ISLAMISM

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Supporters of Osama bin Laden hold his poster decorated with artificial flowers during an anti-U.S. rally, Sept. 23, 2001, in Karachi, Pakistan.

Since the 2006 Palestinian elections, a curious mix of Palestinian propagandists, Israeli “peace processors,” and Hamas apologists have run parallel campaigns of obfuscation meant to convince us that nothing has changed. They argue that despite the electoral victory of a Palestinian party opposed to peace with Israel on principle, there are still opportunities for progress toward a negotiated agreement and even a final settlement. Indeed, some argue that the opportunities have never been greater. How is it possible to entertain this argument, which might charitably be called counter-intuitive?

It becomes possible when one wishes it to be so. Among its most dedicated proponents, the “peace process” is understood as a systematic effort to reach a fixed point in the firmament – a point of perfect convergence between the needs of Israel and the Palestinians. This point is “the solution,” and it is usually defined as two states, Israeli and Palestinian, living side by side in mutual recognition and agreed borders, largely along the June 4, 1967, lines.

The location of such a fixed point was in doubt even earlier, when Yasir Arafat turned his back on a two-state solution along precisely these lines at the failed Camp David negotiations in 2000. The election of Hamas would seem to have disproved the point’s very existence. But within days of the election, the “peace process” pundits were quick to reassure all and sundry that the point remained fixed in the firmament. True, the cloud of Hamas rhetoric conceals it. But it is perfectly visible if only we don special lenses with powerful filters. If you cannot see it even then, you have been blinded by excessively focusing your gaze on the past of Hamas. Now that Hamas is in power, that history – so we are told – is entirely irrelevant. How can this be, when Islamist movements across the Middle East demonstrate repeatedly that their past is the best predictor of their future? The answer: the Palestinians, in this as all else, are exceptions.

Palestinian Exceptionalism

In a critique of Middle Eastern studies that I published a few years ago, I analyzed the myth of Palestinian exceptionalism – the notion disseminated by Palestinian intellectuals that the Palestinians are different (and somehow superior) to all other Arabs. Lacking a state of their own, they compensated by acquiring education, setting them above other Arabs. (How often is it claimed that they are “the most educated” of all Arabs?) We were told that national solidarity was reflected in the integration of non-Muslim Palestinians into the leadership of the Palestinian cause – a secular cause, immune to religious radicalism. (Think Hanan Ashrawi, a nominal Christian and a woman to boot, or Edward Said.) The absence of a strong Palestinian government, we were told, made possible the development of a broad-based civil society, resting on political pluralism and democratic principles.

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The misrule of Yasir Arafat shattered most of these myths. The Palestinians looked less like exceptions, and more like a variation on a familiar theme. The Palestinian patterns of government and society seemed to parallel, if not duplicate, those of the Arab world generally.

Now comes a new myth to replace the old, and it is this: although the Palestinians have an Islamic movement, Hamas, it differs from all the other Islamic movements. Hamas, we are told, is national more than it is Islamic. In fact, it is none other than the Palestinian national movement in Islamic garb. Islam is simply another language in which the



A poster found on a propaganda and indoctrination CD distributed by Hamas. The title reads: "Chechnya, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Kashmir, Palestine and Lebanon."



Palestinian national desire for independence is expressed – a language that is more authentic than the old language of secular nationalism, but that otherwise conveys precisely the same meaning. Since Hamas is more nationalist than it is Islamist, it has the well being of the Palestinians at the top of its priorities. It is bound to show ideological flexibility in pursuit of real-world results. Hamas should not be feared, we are reassured; indeed, it should be avidly courted.

Hamas itself has no authoritative religious leaders. It depends on a number of non-Palestinian religious persons who reside abroad, and who issue rulings of Islamic law that bind Hamas in its operations.

Generally speaking, there is a structural tendency in our interpretation of Middle Eastern politics to downplay the salience of Islam. Twenty-nine years after the Iranian revolution, we are still surprised when Islamists act in accord with their stated values. The murder of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat by Islamic extremists in 1981; Ayatollah Khomeini's call for the death of novelist Salman Rushdie in 1989; the terror attacks of September 11, 2001; the statements of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad urging the elimination

of Israel and denying the Holocaust; the blow-up over the Danish cartoons – again and again, we are surprised and even shocked when the core values of Islam drive the actions of any Muslim.

This is due only partly to wishful thinking, but rather reflects a very peculiar understanding of motive. We ascribe preponderant weight to what seem to us rational motives. For example, it appears axiomatic to us that if we starve Hamas for funds, Hamas will capitulate. We dismiss contrary statements from Hamas leaders ("we will subsist on thyme and olives") as mere posturing and bravado. In the end, this approach is itself entirely irrational, since it effectively dismisses the direct evidence of experience.

Pan-Islamic Hamas

The inter-Islamic linkages of Hamas belong to the category of evidence that is usually dismissed. To do so, of course, one has to exclude a great corpus of evidence, both visual and verbal. One visual example is a Hamas collage that figures on its various Internet websites. The collage assembles the portraits of three people in a pyramid – one on top and two on the bottom. On the bottom there are pictures of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and Abd al-Aziz Rantisi, two Palestinian Hamas leaders who were eliminated by Israel in targeted interceptions. The third person, positioned at the top of the pyramid, is Hasan al-Banna, the Egyptian teacher who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt



in 1928. Al-Banna was the “guide” (*murshid*) of the movement until his murder by the Egyptian secret police in 1949.

The very same people who financed jihads in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya are the ones who now fill suitcases with cash that are smuggled into Gaza by Hamas leaders.

This is a visual demonstration of a fact known to anyone familiar with Hamas texts. Hamas draws its legitimacy from its connection to the Muslim Brotherhood. Article Two of the 1988 Hamas Covenant defines Hamas as a dependency of the Brotherhood: “The Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas] is one of the wings of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. The Muslim Brotherhood movement is a global organization and is the largest of the Islamic movements in modern times.” Article Seven speaks to the “universality” of Hamas: “Muslims who adopt the way of the Islamic Resistance Movement are found in all countries of the world, and act to support [the movement], to adopt its positions and to reinforce its *jihad*. Therefore, it is a world movement.”

At this point the covenant offers a pre-history of the Hamas tie to the Muslim Brotherhood. Phases include the 1936 uprising of the Palestinian Sheikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam “and his brethren the *jihad* fighters of the Muslim Brotherhood.” These are followed by “efforts and *jihad* of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1948 war, and the *jihad* operations of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1968 and afterwards.”

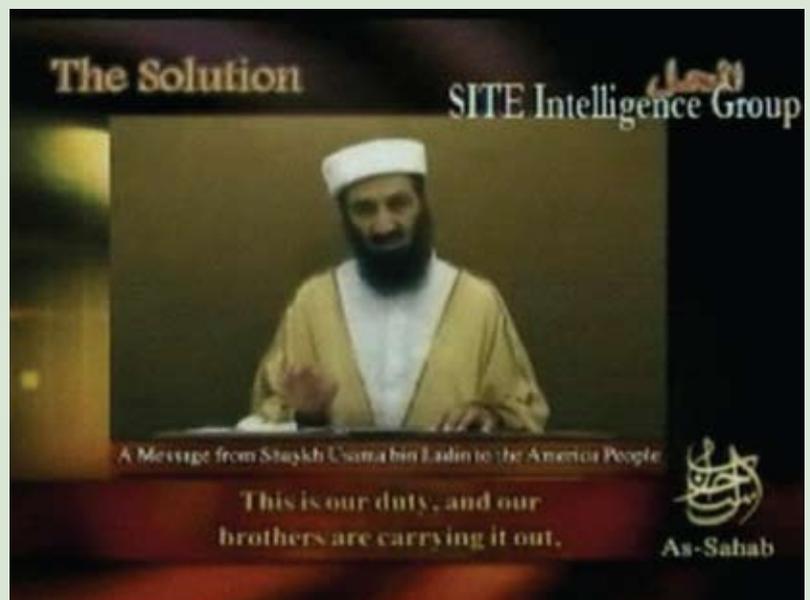
The Muslim Brotherhood movement, then, is presented as the mother movement of Hamas, and as a *jihad* movement involved at three points in time in practically assisting the *jihad* against the Zionists. The mentions of Palestinian *jihad* in 1936, 1948, and 1968, accompanied by emphasis on the link with the Muslim Brotherhood, are hardly accidental. They give Hamas a longer history than Fatah, and cast Hamas as part of a global movement. Hamas traces its link with the Muslim Brotherhood back to the father figure of political Islam, Hasan al-Banna. It was his son-in-law, the Egyptian Said Ramadan, who in the 1940s had direct authority over the activities of the Brotherhood in Palestine. After Nasser’s 1952 revolution and the suppression of the Brotherhood in Egypt, Ramadan escaped to Jordan, where he spent a few years trying to recruit general Islamic support for another round with Israel.

This dependence on the Muslim Brotherhood continues today, quite obviously in the case of moral leadership. Hamas itself has no authoritative religious leaders. It depends on a number of non-Palestinian religious persons who reside abroad, and who issue rulings of Islamic law that bind Hamas in its operations. One of them is Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Egyptian who resides in Qatar and who has a popular television show on the Al-Jazeera satellite channel. Qaradawi is the paramount source of the Islamic rulings that have governed Hamas’ use of suicide bombings. For example, it was Qaradawi who permitted women to carry out suicide missions, and allowed them to approach their target unveiled and alone, without the usual accompanying male required of believing women who venture out in public.

Hamas also solicits donations from wealthy Arabs in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Article Fourteen of the Hamas Covenant identifies three circles that must be mobilized to liberate Palestine: the Palestinian, the Arab and the Muslim. It would be an ignorant mistake, the covenant admonishes, to neglect the furthest of these circles, especially since Palestine is a Muslim country, the first direction of Muslim prayer, and seat of the third most important mosque after Mecca and Medina. The article states that liberating Palestine is obligatory for every Muslim wherever he might be, and that this is a duty that can be met by extending financial support to the cause. This is precisely the message that Hamas broadcasts to the very same people who financed *jihads* in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya. They are the ones who now fill suitcases with cash that are smuggled into Gaza by Hamas leaders.

Article Twenty-Eight of the covenant urges the countries surrounding Israel to “open their borders to *jihad* fighters from among the Arab and Islamic

This image taken from an undated video produced by al-Qaeda’s media arm, Al-Sahab, and made available on Sept. 7, 2007 by the SITE Institute, a Washington-based group that monitors terror messages, shows Osama bin Laden speaking in the first new video of the al-Qaeda leader in three years.





A masked Hamas militant stand guards as thousands of supporters gather as Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, not seen, delivers a speech during a rally in Gaza City, Dec. 15, 2006.

peoples,” and demands of other Arab and Islamic countries that they “facilitate the passage of the *jihād* fighters into them and out of them – that is the very least [they can do].” At the time the covenant was compiled, Hamas apparently believed that there would be a need to import foreign *mujahidin*, as in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and now Iraq. In practice, Hamas recruited locally, and the tight control of Israel’s borders did not allow the import of foreign fighters.

In fact, the flow has been in reverse: Palestinians have played a not-inconsiderable role in the global *jihād*. The most famous was Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian from the Jenin area, who studied Islamic law in Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, and who later taught in Saudi Arabia, where he met Osama bin Laden. It was Azzam who organized training camps in Afghanistan for Arab volunteers, until he was killed in 1989. There have been a few other Palestinians in the higher echelons of al-Qaeda, like Abu Zubaida, alongside the more famous Saudis, Egyptians, and Jordanians.

In the past Hamas has imbibed from the same ideological springs as the global *jihadi* movements. The Hamas website page that provides religious justifications for suicide operations features the legal opinions of a number of Saudi religious radicals, such as Sheikh Safar al-Hawali and Sheikh Salman al-Awda. The site also includes rulings from Sheikh Hamud bin Uqla al-Shuaibi and Sheikh Sulayman al-Ulwan, both of whom have served as

al-Qaeda clerics. Several of al-Qaeda’s key members and leading commanders came out of the Muslim Brotherhood, the parent organization of Hamas. This is not only true of Abdullah Azzam, mentioned above, but also 9/11 mastermind Khaled Sheikh Muhammad, who joined the Muslim Brotherhood in Kuwait. Thus, al-Qaeda and Hamas might best be described as two branches of the same tree.

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Nonetheless, declaratively, Hamas has tended to keep a distance from the global *jihādists*, who are arch-enemies of the very Saudis who patronize Hamas. But the rise of Hamas to power has made it a sought-after partner for Islamists everywhere. This is certainly the case for the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is a branch. Hamas has achieved something that the Brotherhood in the neighboring countries has never achieved – control over territory – and the Brotherhood is already mobilizing internationally to sustain Hamas through difficult times. Hamas in power could offer refuge and a base for other Brotherhood movements.



There is a perfect example of this, from a decade ago. In Sudan, the Muslim Brotherhood rose to power under the leadership of the charismatic Hasan at-Turabi. Turabi then was presented much like Hamas “prime minister” Ismail Haniya is presented today: as a model of moderation. Yet Turabi opened the gates of Sudan to the most radical of the Islamists. Osama bin Laden spent a few years there, extremist summit conferences met in Khartoum, and Hamas opened an office in the Sudanese capital. Sudan became a transit point for Fathi Shikaki of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, for Tunisian Islamist Rashid al-Ghannushi, for representatives of the Algerian FIS, the Lebanese Hizbullah, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

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Since the fall of Turabi from power, there is no locus for this kind of networking. If Hamas succeeds in holding on to power, it is not impossible that it will attempt to play the same role played by Turabi, as a mediator and bridge. At some point, this could involve liaisons with the global *jihad*. The global *jihad* is highly mobile and completely opportunistic. It moves from void to void – from Afghanistan to Bosnia, from Bosnia to Chechnya, from Chechnya to Iraq. If the United States succeeds in driving al-Qaeda out of Iraq, or if it is marginalized by Iraq’s own Sunni tribes, al-Qaeda could move westward. It already has an infrastructure in Jordan, and its extension into the Palestinian arena might complement the strategy of Hamas in some future scenario.

In conclusion, Hamas is not simply a local Palestinian movement. It is a movement with a regional Islamic profile, even if it limits its operations to the Palestinian arena. A new word has come into being in English: glocal. It refers to the combination of global and local, and is used to characterize companies, movements and organizations. The Hamas movement is a decidedly glocal movement that draws its strength both from the Palestinian struggle and from the global ascent of Islamist movements. Hamas has affinities and loyalties to groups and people outside of the Palestinian arena that seek to transform the existing world order from its very foundations. The evidence is overwhelming, but this will not prevent it from being ignored. And when Hamas does suddenly act in ways that are more pan-Islamic than Palestinian, the analysts will be surprised – again.