Bringing Back the Palestinian State: Hamas between Government and Resistance

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Bringing Back the Palestinian State: Hamas between Government and Resistance

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ABSTRACT Most of the literature on Hamas that focuses on its role as both a government and a resistance movement has emphasized how the organization either is conditioned historically to being a sociopolitical and military entity or is treading a path of de-radicalization. Emphasizing the limitations of such analyses, this article proposes a recalibration of the manner in which we study Palestinian politics in general and the Islamic Resistance in particular. To this effect, and drawing on reflections from fieldwork experiences in the Gaza Strip, it claims that Hamas today isn’t necessarily engaging in a praxis of political behavior of its own creation but rather is living a Palestinian vernacular condition mandated by the Oslo Accords. That said, within this condition, political behavior not only is informed by the state as an aspiration but also by the state as a model and inspiration, as it marks and informs the conduct of political factions. Then, by proposing the existence of a Palestinian state in oscillation between being an aspiration and an inspiration, it is hoped that it would allow for new parameters and a vocabulary for understanding Palestinian politics as more than a ‘problem’ waiting to be solved. Rather, Palestinian politics emerge as a site for reconsidering the manner in which the politics of liberation movements can be understood.

KEY WORDS: Fatah; Gaza Strip; Government; Hamas; Oslo Accords; Palestinian Authority; resistance; state

While undertaking field research in the Gaza Strip, it became apparent to me that the Palestinian Authority (PA) in this Palestinian territory, as in the West Bank, ‘dresses’ very much like a state. Established by the 1993 Oslo Accord as the first institutional basis for Palestinian self-authority and the eventual (albeit still elusive) sovereign and independent Palestinian state, it encompasses ministries, administrative departments and bureaucracies. The PA even maintains relations with some foreign governments (to the extent tolerated by Israel) while locally extracting value-added-taxes and duties. It administers robust police and internal security forces that carry out surveillance of the population living within Israeli-designated zones. It issues Palestinian passports and...
monitors and controls the movement of people in and out of the Gaza Strip. All of this is done under the auspices of, and while wearing, the official (state-like) insignia of the PA. However, even though the PA ‘dresses’ like a state, the reality remains that the sovereign Palestinian state has yet to come into existence, thus making its attainment central to the rhetoric and the obvious intellectual impulse of the Palestinian liberation struggle. This reality was made clear in the early summer of 2013 as I sat in Deputy Foreign Minister Ghazi Hamad’s office at the PA’s Foreign Ministry in the Gaza Strip. With the PA’s emblem in the background and a Palestinian flag on his side, Hamad, appointed by Hamas, said to me, ‘We need to liberate the land first. Before we do anything else we a need to create a clear liberation platform and use it to acquire a Palestinian state.’

It was in the midst of this complex political reality that Hamas (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya or Islamic Resistance Movement) found itself after winning the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) election. Fatah refused to be part of a Hamas-led government, and the institutions of governance and the Islamic Resistance seemingly entered a new phase. Hamas assumed sole leadership in governing the Gaza Strip, and it did so while remaining officially committed to an armed struggle. The analyses and literature that were produced to explain the rise of Hamas to the helm of Palestinian politics largely was concerned with articulating the momentous nature and symbolic vitality of the occurrence. For many writers, the rise to power by an opposition group and the victory of an Islamist entity in democratic elections in the Arab world represented ‘two firsts in modern Middle East history.’ Those explicating the implications for Hamas saw the election as emblematic of a historically evolving organization demonstrating an identity that has committed itself simultaneously to conducting resistance activities and providing social services. Still others, subsequently building on the notion of an evolving organization, saw the post-2006 election period as indicative of a ‘de-radicalizing’ Hamas. This meant that the ‘new’ Hamas would be a political organization engaged in more ‘state-building.’ and less ‘fighting,’’ and therefore it would be less radical.

Despite a vibrant, post-2006 discussion, what continues to be largely unexplored is that Hamas’s entrance into the PA, currently the only institutional parameter for governing the Palestinian territories, meant being part of ‘an authority that is not a state, and a state that has neither recognized borders nor a monopoly on the use of force.’ It is within this reality that this article places itself. Its analytical focus is the (new) political practice in which Hamas finds itself engaging, i.e., remaining officially committed to being the government and continuing its resistance. I recognize that, while Hamas historically has developed an identity committed to sociopolitical and military activism, its entrance into

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3 Author interview, Gaza City, June 2013.
4 Owing to Fatah’s boycott.
6 The term ‘resistance’ will be used as euphemism for an armed struggle.
7 Hamas as a social actor is represented by its social service operations, broadly categorized as educational (kindergarten, schools, enriching group activities, summer camps and universities), medical (clinics and hospitals), religious (mosques and Quran memorizing institutes) and welfare (distributing financial and material aid, especially during economic crises, Muslim holidays and during Ramadan). See: E. Pascovich (2012) Social-Civilian Apparatuses of Hamas, Hizballah and Other Activist Islamic Organizations, Digest of Middle East Studies, 21(1), p. 130.
government is not entirely a continuation of its historical role. After the 2006 elections, Hamas’s governmental operations now became implanted into the realm of official politics, and this meant, as Egyptian expert Gamal Abdel Gawad Soltan said, ‘Charity was now transformed into a matter of public policy.’ That said, here the understanding of ‘newness’ is not concerned with ‘how much’ governance or ‘how little’ resistance Hamas may undertake (as a means of quantifying de-radicalization) owing to the methodological limitations of knowing the reasons behind a recalibration of its operational scope. Instead, the ‘new Hamas’ here chooses to do both. Working within this framework, the question remains: ‘What fundamentally informs Hamas’s behavior as both government and resistance?’

It is here that the Palestinian state is brought back in as having utility as a common denominator informing political behavior in the Palestinian territories. Most visibly, the existence of the state as an aspiration lies at the core of the Palestinian liberation struggle. Moreover, the aspiration of a sovereign and territorially inviolable state frequently and most visibly was manifested through an armed struggle prior to the Oslo Agreement. Even though a serious discussion about the state emerged in the wake of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PA, it disappeared after 2000 with the agreement’s failure to establish an internationally recognized sovereign Palestinian state. Nevertheless, one still might claim that, apart from being an aspiration, the state also has existed in the Palestinian territories as an inspiration for political behavior since the Oslo mandated PA has remained the institution for governing the occupied territories. Indeed, the Palestinian governing entities, i.e., their institutions and ministries, despite their notoriously limited operational capabilities and lack of sovereignty, have been the basis for performing state-like activities. Moreover, this has been done without such state-like behavior being informed by a territorially sovereign and independent Palestinian state. Specifically in respect to the case of Hamas, which since 2006/07 has espoused the role of both government and resistance, it could be posited that the Islamic Resistance doesn’t necessarily inhabit a condition of its own creative doing. Instead, it is simply living as a non-exceptional entity within a general Palestinian condition whose ‘rules’ have been set-forth by the dictates of the Oslo Accords. Its armed operations are reflective of the central role resistance has played as the most audible manifestation of the Palestinian liberation movement’s aspiration for a Palestinian state. In a similar vein, as Hamas performs its role as the government through the PA, like its predecessor, its actions at the helm also inadvertently are shaped and inspired by the state in its (state-like) governance activities, while not being informed by a sovereign Palestinian state. One then could conclude that the implication for Hamas, having committed itself to the role of government and resistance since 2006/07, has less to do with a unique path tread by the organization. Instead, through the inclusion of the ‘state’ as an aspiration and inspiration, it provides us with the opportunity to re-calibrate the parameters through which behavior of Palestinian political factions is understood.

This article maps the literature on Hamas since the 2006 elections. While recognizing their empirical insights, it points to the key analytical limitations of the works on the organization as being overburdened by an attempt to delineate ‘where Hamas came from’

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10 Author interview, Cairo, January 2013.
and overdriven by a quest to speculate ‘where Hamas is headed’. In lieu of this, there is value in limiting our focus, not on what Hamas was or what Hamas will be, but on what Hamas is, especially with regard to connecting it to and elaborating on the general Palestinian condition that the organization ‘lives.’ With this understanding in place, I explore the key determinant factor that informs political behavior of Palestinian factions living this condition. This exploration understands the state as both an aspiration and an inspiration for the political behavior of governing entities within the Palestinian political landscape, manifested most visibly through the state-like functions of the PA. The article concludes with a short insight into what it means to bring the state back into any discussion on Hamas and Palestinian politics, and on a broader scale, the politics of liberation movements in general. Although this article is framed largely as a ‘first step’ into reconstituting the way we study the politics of Hamas within the context of the Palestinian liberation movement, it also assesses the literature on Hamas since 2006, draws on key interviews with members of the Islamic Resistance’s leadership and its affiliates, and presents reflections drawn from my fieldwork conducted in the Gaza Strip between May and June, 2013.

**Talking About Hamas: From a ‘Problem’ to a ‘Condition’**

It was the unexpectedness of the 2006 PLC election results that has shaped most of the literature about Hamas since that event. For some writers, an Islamist victory signified the end of the exclusive Palestinian political landscape with Fatah at its helm and the democratization of Palestinian politics through the inclusion of Hamas. Others viewed it as a political contradiction that Hamas received an electoral mandate to govern a Palestinian territory, as it continued its commitment to an armed struggle and rejected the basic framework of the Oslo Accords, the Quartet-led ‘roadmap to peace’ and calls to recognize Israel. Nevertheless, even though Hamas found itself unprepared and isolated in governing the Gaza Strip, it was Paola Caridi who rightly deemed it only predictable that it would espouse a ‘dual status.’ This meant that the post-2006 Hamas would remain ‘... a resistance movement while also exerting [political] power.’ This being the status quo, a significant niche of the post-2006 literature re-emphasized that Hamas historically had encompassed both sociopolitical and resistance identities. Furthermore, they

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13 Sayigh, p. 13.
16 Caridi, p. 36
posited that it was Hamas’s espousal of this dual status, along with its Islamic identity,\(^{19}\) that eventually garnered it moral legitimacy and electoral success\(^{20}\) (including the 2006 elections) as it met the Palestinian populace’s material needs\(^{21}\) and created a sense of community in the face of ‘steady [socioeconomic] deterioration.’\(^{22}\) Subsequently others, while recognizing the above, explored the implications of an Islamic Resistance now encompassing the role of a resistance and a government and having to align its short-term responsibilities and long-term aspirations.\(^{23}\) Specifically, this meant that it had two possible paths ahead of it: One marked by ‘politics, pragmatism, and moderation’ and the other by ‘a return to arms and opposition ... to any possibility of negotiations.’\(^{24}\)

Confronted with these choices and being firmly committed to the perception of an ever-evolving Hamas, for most the Islamic Resistance had followed a distinct path of de-radicalization since 2006, i.e., it has engaged in more state-building, less fighting. Almost reminiscent of a human life cycle, they insinuated a ‘new’ Hamas that had traversed the recklessness of youth as a resistance movement and now had come upon the maturity of old age as the government. To this effect, Michael Irving Jensen evidenced moderation through Hamas’s decision to participate\(^{25}\) in the 2006 elections\(^{26}\) while Loren Lybarger\(^{27}\) and Khaled Hroub saw a ‘de-radicalizing’ organization in its ‘relaxed and semi-secular’\(^{28}\) election agenda. Hroub further saw a moderating Hamas in its post-election practicality, pragmatism and an eagerness to ally with other Palestinian political factions.\(^{29}\) Finally, Are Hovdenak and Baudouin Long saw Hamas de-radicalizing through a de-escalation of violence since the 1990s\(^{30}\) and with its political wing distancing itself from the al-Qassam brigades\(^{31}\) seemingly prompted by ‘Palestinian public opinion and Israeli pressure.’\(^{32}\)

Although the works cited above are not exhaustive, they represent the general intellectual impulse of the post-2006 literature on Hamas. The ‘Palestinian issue’ often is considered an integral part of Middle East studies, and works on Hamas frequently have

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20 Gunning, p. 144.
21 Pascovich, p. 133.
24 Caridi, p. 336.
25 In the lead-up to the first PLC elections in 1996 and despite Hamas vehemently opposing the Oslo Accords, its iconic founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Hassan Yassin, in a letter from prison in October 1993, initially urged members to participate in the electoral process, according to Z. Chenab (2007), *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies*, p. 107 (London: I. B. Taurus). This had an immense impact on the Hamas cadre, with Ismail Haniyeh deciding to contest the elections on the basis of ‘a wide support base, which enabled them to take political risks’ (Gunning, p. 110). Nevertheless, in the face of a lack of unanimous support within the group Haniyeh withdrew his candidacy, thus ensuring that the Islamic Resistance presented a unified front in opposing the PLC elections (Gunning, p. 111).
30 Hovdenak, p. 62.
32 Long, p. 140.
been embedded within the broader notion of a (Palestinian) problem ‘... waiting for a solution.’ This has meant that the ‘story of Hamas’ often begins with an attempt to rectify the ignorance with regard to the roots of this problem, and thus why it is critical for the literature to explain ‘where Hamas came from.’ Similarly, after establishing the historical roots of the problem, the next step was to present the ‘story of Hamas’ with an air of certainty, thus explaining the need to speculate ‘where Hamas is headed.’

However, despite the convincing empirical insights provided in the literature, one also could point to two seminal limitations to their analytical utility.

First, drawing on the literature of ‘where Hamas came from,’ one could be tempted to claim that Hamas in government (while being a resistance) is a continuation of an identity that primordially compels it to espouse a social, political and military role in Palestinian politics. It is true that Hamas historically has been experienced in and conditioned to being a sociopolitical and military actor. However, the literature about Hamas fails to understand that its entrance into government also meant a significant change in its operational scope, as Hamas’s socio-civilian activities now were incorporated into the realm of ‘official’ politics, which effectively converted its ‘social service’ into ‘public policy.’ Furthermore, this meant that Hamas’s (especially political and social) operations were implanted into and limited by the ‘firm structure[s]’ of official politics (and the Palestinian Authority). This concomitantly then signified a qualitative shift in Hamas’s historical identity, as a movement signified by ‘continuous action, free of rigid organization’ to one that now was burdened by the responsibilities of an entire ‘populace’ and restricted by the state-like institutional structure of the PA.

Second, being burdened by the responsibilities (and limitations) of official politics, it would seem predictable that a de-emphasis of Hamas’s military operations would ensue. Because state building instinctively is associated with ‘order’ while violence is linked with disorder (and thus seemingly incompatible with governance), it also would seem obvious that Hamas as a government would overshadow Hamas as a resistance. While this trajectory of change and supposed ‘de-radicalization’ has been evidenced by Hamas’s de-emphasis on violence, in rhetoric and practice, criticisms also could be made about this perspective of an Islamic Resistance re-calibrating its operational priorities. The obvious evidence demonstrating that Hamas has engaged in fewer military operations requires that one explain the reasons behind this change. However, with limited or no access to Hamas’s internal decision-making processes, it is difficult to document the reasons why Hamas changed its operational scope. Nevertheless, like the African National Congress (ANC) and Irish Republican Army (IRA), Hamas has shown the capability to transition from an ‘armed struggle to negotiated settlement.’ Thus, its change in tactics simply could be an

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33 This categorization of the intellectual impulse surrounding studies on Hamas is adopted from M. Hulme’s work on climate change (2009) Why We Disagree on Climate Change, p. xxviii (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
34 This tendency was further emphasized when, during the 1990s, the Islamic Resistance established separate social, political and military wings. (Wiegand, p. 137)
attempt to meet the requirements of a new political reality. It is also true that over the years Hamas’s military engagement with Israel not only has been infrequent, but also, as noted by a Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa TV journalist, ‘far more reactive [to Israeli military actions], than proactive.’

Despite this reality, however, Hamas also has maintained its official commitment to the resistance. Faced with the continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, a blockade on the Gaza Strip since the 2006 legislative elections, the marginalization of Hamas from official negotiations in the post-Oslo era and ritual Israeli military onslaughts on the Gaza Strip in 2008–09, 2012 and 2014, Hamas sees a military means of contention as an essential defensive tactic. Reminding us that the organization’s military operations are a response to Israeli actions, Mousa Abu Marzook, Deputy Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, in a 1997 interview, noted, ‘If there was no occupation, there would be no resistance.’ Similarly, during our conversation, Hamas Spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum said, ‘One should remember that Hamas is first a liberation organization. It’s a resistance and a movement against the occupation. It is also important to remember that it’s a resistance as a result of the occupation and not vice versa.’

Furthermore, during my fieldwork in the Gaza Strip, the ‘resistance agenda’ also seemed to be synonymous with life in Gaza under Hamas. For example, Hamas-affiliated TV programming, murals and posters depicting the martyred not only evoked resistance but also it was central in every conversation with the Hamas leadership. Reflecting this, Ahmed Bahar, the Hamas Deputy Speaker of the PLC, stated during the graduation ceremony for a Master’s degree student and the presentation of his thesis on water purification at Al-Aqsa University: ‘Studies like these will keep the resistance alive and take us to Jerusalem.’ Hamas thus seemingly continues forth with a ‘resistance agenda’ and the arbitrariness of the notion of ‘de-radicalization’ emerges as it becomes difficult to articulate what the concept (of de-radicalization) entails. ‘How little’ resistance would signify a moderating organization? Conversely, ‘how much’ resistance qualifies an organization as radical? Additionally, if resistance is so intertwined with life in the Gaza Strip, centering the notion of de-radicalization solely on the reduced emphasis on resistance in the group’s charters and manifestos also has its own limitation. Inadvertently, critiquing scholars like Hroub who perceive de-radicalization as evidenced through a ‘moderating’ rhetoric, Jeroen Gunning asserts,

One of the reasons Hamas focused its electoral programme on its (non-violent) domestic programme was that it did not need to emphasise its resistance record. It was on display during numerous victory rallies staged to celebrate the withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip in summer 2005, complete with marching militia-men in military fatigues and rocket launchers . . . It was implied in countless posters of Hamas’s martyrs which adorned streets as well as election rallies.

37 Author interview, Gaza City, May 2013.
39 Author interview, Gaza Strip, June 2013.
40 The author was in attendance in the audience during the ceremony at Al-Aqsa University, Gaza City, May 2013.
41 Gunning, p. 177.
With these limitations emerging when overburdened by Hamas’s historical identity and overdriven by an attempt to speculate its future, I refrain from conceptualizing the organization as one on a trajectory of change and transformation. Instead, I perceive the Islamic Resistance on the basis of the static reality of the role the organization now embodies, i.e., it is both a government and a resistance. My concern is not necessarily ‘where Hamas came from’ or ‘where Hamas is headed’ but what Hamas is today. The particular utility of this proposed perspective emerged through my interviews with members of the Hamas political leadership and affiliates. For example, in talking about ‘life’ as a government and resistance, Fawzi Barhoum said, ‘[T]he occupation has not subsided. It has not stopped its aggression against Gaza. Therefore, even though it’s not easy, we must do both [government and resistance]. It is for this reason that the Palestinian people understand and believe in it.’ Similarly, Atef Adwan, currently a Hamas PLC member, saw the Islamic Resistance as electorally mandated to espouse a dual role during an interview at his legislative council office. He noted, ‘[B]ecause of the 2006 elections we now have an obligation to be both a government and resistance and therefore didn’t give up. But while fighting is important, what does fighting mean if you can’t govern yourself? What is the meaning of liberation? If we look at the old rulers [Fatah]… there was a huge divide between the rulers and the fighters. They were fighting amongst themselves and causing problems for the fighters. The people were fed up and wanted to get rid of this system. One can say that over the last seven years, even though it is difficult, Hamas has been a good government and resistance and therefore people are on our side.’

Reflecting on the trials and tribulations of embodying a ‘dual status,’ Wesam I. Afifa, Director General of Al-Resalah Media Institution (a Hamas-affiliated organization) said, in the shadow of a photograph of Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh: ‘The question is what comes first: building a state or liberation? Today we have a government but it’s a government without a state. And this principle is a problem of Oslo. For people in Gaza, the normal people, liberation is the most important, but what combination should we have? Not [like the] West Bank, of course. The problem now is that we don’t have a term of reference. Neither are we part of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and neither are we part of the Palestinian Authority.’ Similarly, Ghazi Hamas declared: ‘The Oslo Accords were a mistake. In the beginning it was sold as the first step for the Palestinians to create a state. But we can see that it was false hope and painted a rosy picture. They deceived us by giving us false hope. It was a big illusion… It was not there to create a state but it is there to decrease the cost of the occupation.’

In my interviews with the above-cited officials, they chose to elaborate on various aspects of this life. Nevertheless, whether it was the cumbersome nature or the paradoxical character of governing Gaza, all pointed to the palpable problematique rooted in being a government and resistance. That is, despite Hamas having ‘settled in’ to a somewhat stable

42 Of course, our ability to understand Hamas on the basis of this framework is largely owed to the fact that the organization now encompasses a highly institutional socio-civilian wing and military operations without any convincing evidence of it renouncing the latter.
43 Author interview, Gaza City, June 2013.
44 Author interview, Gaza City, May 2013.
45 Author interview, Gaza City, June 2013.
46 Author interview, Gaza City, May 2013.
system since 2006/07, the ‘static’ reality of what the organization is means performing the non-existent sovereign state through the PA and concomitantly, owing to the failure of the PA in providing the sovereign state, fighting for the same. It is, then, the seemingly paradoxical nature of this ‘reality’ that in fact connects Hamas to a general Palestinian dilemma that has emerged since the Oslo Accords. When the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements declared the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1993, most wondered how a ‘statist agenda’ (as imbued in the ‘Principles’) would impact a people still engaged in a liberation movement. In light of this, Yossi Shain and Gary Sussman declared that, even though the Oslo Accords stimulated the process of state-building in the Palestinian territories, concerns still remained as to the implications for the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) of transforming itself from being a liberation movement in exile to being the sole Palestinian governing entity. Moreover, as state-building was seemingly underway, it was deemed still problematic that ‘[t]he terms of Palestinian sovereignty, particularly the scope of statehood and territorial boundaries, are far from resolved in the minds of Israelis and Palestinians.’

Similarly, Yezid Sayigh explored the implications and concerns emerging from the PLO’s post-Oslo strategy of state building with regard to its impact on armed operations, a historical facet of the Palestinian liberation struggle. What the post-Oslo deliberations illuminated is the perpetual question that confronts Palestinian political factions when entering the PA as a governing entity: ‘How should one perform Palestinian self-authority while also continuing on the path of a liberation struggle?’ With no Palestinian state in sight, Palestinian factions officially have remained committed to a Palestinian liberation movement and with it, an armed struggle. However, with the PA remaining as the only institutional basis for governing, this has meant that Palestinian factions also have performed (albeit disingenuously) Palestinian self-authority without a sovereign and internationally recognized Palestinian state in the background. As a new entrant into the realm of ‘official politics’, Hamas emphasized its identity as a non-exceptional Palestinian faction engaging in ‘state-like’ behavior while fighting for a sovereign and territorially inviolable Palestinian state. Thus, the Islamic Resistance, as a government and resistance, is not necessarily embodying a new kind of political practice of its own creation. Instead, it is another Palestinian actor thrust into the role of governing Palestinian territory and simply ‘living’ within the boundaries of a Palestinian vernacular condition. It is a condition specific to the way politics have been experienced since the Oslo Accords, which compel Palestinian factions in government to be institutionally mandated to perform Palestinian state and self-authority, while, in the

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49 Shain & Sussman, p. 275.
51 As often claimed by the organization’s leaders.
absence of real sovereignty, to remain embedded in a liberation movement, often as an armed struggle. This situation means that the pressures of doing both at the helm of Palestinian politics have led Palestinian factions to change their operational priorities. For example Fatah, having headed the PA for years (unequivocally until 2006) and despite having engaged in an armed struggle during the Second Intifada, has largely refrained from conducting military operations against Israel. Hamas represents another non-exceptional case of the dilemma Palestinian factions face while in government. This dilemma forces us to recognize the existence of a Palestinian vernacular condition in which the ‘dilemma’ is embedded.

Bringing Back the Palestinian State

With Hamas compelled to live this condition as a governing entity in the Palestinian territories, the question remains: ‘What determines its behavior while living this condition?’ It is here that the Palestinian state is seen as having analytical utility and considered critical in shaping political conduct as both an aspiration and inspiration. The existence of the Palestinian state as an aspiration can be considered as that which perennially informs the Palestinian liberation movement and its adherents’ identities. It existed in 1974, when PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat made his first address to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and insisted on the PLO’s right ‘to establish an independent national State on all liberated Palestinian territory.’54 In a similar vein it was present when the 1988 Palestinian National Council’s Declaration of Independence affirmed ‘the rise of the Palestinian state in our Palestinian land, the natural climax of a daring and tenacious popular struggle that started more than 70 years ago and was baptized in the immense sacrifices offered by our people in our homeland, along its borders, and in the camps and other sites of our Diaspora.’55 Moreover, with the struggle and aspiration for a state marking the broad parameters of the Palestinian liberation struggle, its most audible manifestation has been an armed struggle.

From a Fanonian perspective an armed rebellion in the Palestinian context often is perceived as a foundational tactic geared to attacking a ‘regime of oppression’56 and reversing the effects of the same as it perpetually aims at ‘the destruction of the indigenous social fabric, and demolished unchecked the systems of reference of the country’s economy, lifestyles, and modes of dress.’57 In that way, the turn to an armed rebellion within a liberation struggle mimics similar trends witnessed by the Anushilan Samity in Bengal and the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) during the Indian struggle for independence or the eventual turn to violence by the ANC in South Africa.58 In fighting the ‘regime of oppression’ the use of armed tactics also has become a performance of the Palestinian-ness that would anchor and inform the eventual sovereign and recognized Palestinian state. As a young Palestinian in Cairo said, ‘Just like Palestine

56 F. Fanon (1963) The Wretched of the Earth, p. 3 (New York: Grove Press).
57 Fanon, p. 6.
is part of me, fighting is also part of me.’

In this vein, Ghassan Hage noted, with regard to Palestinian suicide bombers, that the use of armed tactics becomes deeply intertwined with what it means to be Palestinian. Each bombing not only is representative of ‘a form of symbolic anticolonial capital’ but also an embodiment of the ‘survival of a Palestinian will.’ Then, with an armed struggle becoming deeply intertwined with an attempt to claim Palestinian identity, it also finds resonance as critical to achieving the ultimate manifestation and aspiration of Palestinian-ness, i.e., the Palestinian state. Sayigh has posited that it was the armed struggle that, despite its limitations, contributed to ‘…demarcating the Palestinians as a distinct actor in regional politics with a not insignificant degree of autonomy.’ Moreover, the armed struggle played a critical role in unifying the Palestinian nation (as a precursor to the state) by evoking the existence of a Palestinian people, providing (through the PLO) an ‘institutional embodiment’ of Palestinian-ness, creating a space for ‘mass participation in national politics’ and finally becoming a framework through which the statist agenda was pursued primarily through the bureaucratization of guerrilla groups.

Hamas, formed and socialized within the Palestinian vernacular condition where the state exists as a goal, also finds itself embodying the aspiration for a sovereign Palestinian state. For example, Ahmed Yousef, the former advisor to Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, declared: ‘We simply need to have a Palestinian state … It is not easy, but we have to build our own country slowly.’ Reflecting the general Palestinian impulse that sees an armed struggle as critical for the effort to attain a Palestinian state, Hamas also frequently utilizes its resistance wing as the most visible and audible manifestation of the aspiration for a Palestinian state. Resistance featured prominently in Hamas’s 1988 Charter and remained evident in its manifesto released on the eve of the legislative elections in January 2006. Furthermore, reflecting the strategic importance of resistance in Hamas’s efforts to secure a Palestinian state, Salama Maroof, General Manager of the (Hamas) Government Media Office noted, ‘The strength of Hamas’s resistance wing is clear. Within two months of being in power, it succeeded in capturing Gilad Shalit and forced the occupation to release more than 1000 prisoners.’ In a similar vein, Atef Adwan claimed: ‘Seven years since the elections one can say that Hamas’s resistance activities have demonstrated that it can bring Israel to make compromises. When the resistance is strong, Israel tends to retreat.’ It is owing to this critical significance of resistance in Hamas’s bid for a Palestinian state that Ghazi Hamad sees its continued relevance. Accordingly he explained: ‘We have kept resistance alive in our values, cultural outlook and made sure that resistance is mentioned in every Hamas document. Even

59 Author interview, Cairo, January 2013.
61 Hage, p. 74.
63 Sayigh, Armed Struggle and State Formation, pp. 20–21.
64 Author interview, Gaza City, June 2013.
66 Author interview, Gaza City, June 2013.
67 Author interview, Gaza City, May 2013.
though it is not easy, we have continuously talked about resistance while being in
government. In 2009 and 2012, they [Israel] reacted to Hamas being power, and yet we
survived because of our resistance wing.\textsuperscript{68}

Hamas, not the least through its armed wing, reflects and embodies the vernacular
Palestinian condition that anchors political behavior as driven by the aspiration for a
Palestinian state. However, the dilemma remains that the aspiration, although so far
informing political sentiment and the intellectual impulse of this condition, has remained
as the only manner in which the ‘state’ has featured in discussions about Palestine. Hamas
has performed state-like activities through the PA, despite its institutions’ limited
sovereignty and capabilities, but how else does the state find resonance as the Islamic
Resistance has assumed the role of government? Of course, the state is a common
denominator informing ‘life as resistance,’ yet Hamas as government also reminds us that
the Palestinian state exists as an inspiration for political behavior when in power, i.e., it
informs ‘life as a government’. For that matter, as noted earlier, the PA dresses very much
like a state, and in doing so it is reminiscent of Theda Skocpol’s perspective, as it is able to
‘influence meaning and methods of politics for all groups and classes in society.’\textsuperscript{69} As a
PA-led institutional semblance of a state, it is able to ‘affect political and social processes
through their policies and their patterned relationships with social groups.’\textsuperscript{70} From this
understanding of the state, the Palestinian variant in existence here is more than an
aspiration. It is able to influence and shape political behavior when manifested through the
PA and therefore inspires politics at the helm of the Palestinian political landscape.
In this way all the ‘symbolic languages of authority’ are apparent: There exist legal
premise and discourse emphasizing the existence of a state-like authority; there exist
symbols and rituals in the form of physical governmental structures and signs; and
there exists an attempt to ‘map’ a national territory informed by a common identity
and culture.\textsuperscript{71} Of course, this seemingly linear story hinting at the existence of the
central facets of the state faces the \textit{problematique} that the Palestinian Authority’s
state-like behavior is not necessarily informed by or based on a sovereign
Palestinian state. It is able to inspire political behavior but is not necessarily
anchored in a territorially distinct entity. For this reason, the Palestinian state is a ‘de-
naturalized’\textsuperscript{72} entity. It speaks like a state\textsuperscript{73} and continuously is reproduced\textsuperscript{74} and rendered
permanent\textsuperscript{75} through the (state-like) behavior it inspires among its adherents in the
Palestinian governing political factions. It may not have a tangible manifestation that is
universally recognized, but it nevertheless persists through a symbolic existence.\textsuperscript{76} One

\textsuperscript{68} Author interview, Gaza City, May 2013.
\textsuperscript{69} T. Skocpol (1985) Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research, in P. B. Evans,
D. Rueschemeyer & T. Skocpol (eds) \textit{Bringing the State Back In}, p. 28 (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University
Press).
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid, p. 3.
\textit{States of Imagination. Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State}, p. 8 (Durham, NC: Duke
University Press).
\textsuperscript{72} Hansen & Stepputat, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, p. 7.
cannot ignore that the Oslo Accords mandated this ‘brand’ of Palestinian state and led subsequent Palestinian governing entities to exercise power at the helm through the PA. In doing so, however, it ensured that the state as an inspiration for political behavior became a central facet of the Palestinian vernacular condition. For this reason, Hamas since 2006, also has tread a path already taken by Fatah and utilized the PA and its institutions to establish its authority as the government in Gaza while performing state-like tasks. As it maintains its credentials as a resistance, Hamas continually emphasizes the ‘lack’ of a Palestinian state as a territorially sovereign and tangible manifestation. However, being in government and performing state-like functions through the PA, Hamas also has underscored the reality of a Palestinian state that exists ‘in practice’ and as an inspiration for political behavior for Palestinian governing entities.

Although studies on Palestine have centred on the lack of a Palestinian state, Hamas as a government and resistance encourages us to explore ‘political practice’ that informs the same. Embedded in and reflective of a Palestinian condition, Hamas’s elevation to the helm of Palestinian politics has demonstrated that the Palestinian state exists as an aspiration and an inspiration for political behavior for governing entities. Instead of studying the Palestinian state as having failed to come to fruition, which is a fundamental impulse of the literature so far, the post-2006 era once again has put forth the opportunity of studying it as something rendered permanent, not in its existence but in its performance through the political behavior it inspires. The explicit, internationally recognized sovereign Palestinian state may not yet exist, but the implicit state does. It is this implicit state that has then been able to be a qualifier of politics in the Palestinian territory, irrespective of whether Fatah or Hamas is at the helm.

Conclusion

By discussing the state, the attempt here was not to make a political statement or a legal argument for the establishment/recognition of a sovereign and territorially inviolable Palestinian state. Instead, drawing on the literature about Hamas as a government and resistance, this article attempts to reconstitute the manner and the parameters through which politics in the Occupied Palestinian Territories are understood. In this respect, studying the Islamic Resistance as embedded in a Palestinian vernacular political condition demonstrates that the state not only exists as an aspiration within the context of the Palestinian liberation movement, but also is able to inform and inspire political behavior in the Palestinian governing entities. Hamas, in power since 2006, is more than a transforming organization embodying a dual role; it illuminates the existence of a general condition that drives political actors to face similar dilemmas and behave in a similar manner. It further encourages us to reassess our understanding of Palestinian factions’ behavior as specific and unique in their individual ideological and historically shaped past when they come into positions of authority. Instead, being driven and shaped by certain pre-existing implicit conditions for political behavior, the Palestinian state is brought back

in as more than simply a territorial construct, but a site for a particular variety of political practice.

One cannot ignore that the Oslo Accords are what cause the political behavior of Palestinian factions in government to be state-like. While the proposals in this article, at the forefront, attempt to reconfigure (and normalize) our understanding of Hamas as an organization within the Palestinian political context, they also provide a basis for reconstituting our perception of socio-civilian and military operations within liberation movements and ask what fundamentally informs their presence. Beyond their instrumental utility, and once again using the state as a denominator, they could be perceived as extra-institutional efforts in state-building where the community of people who would comprise the state is collated before the acquisition of the actual state. Moreover, bringing the state back into the discussion, in the manner done here, has its own implications with regard to how politics are carried out within liberation movements. Besides it being an aspiration, how is the concept of state received and encountered within a liberation movement? Simply put, how does the state travel through a liberation movement? While much has been said with regard to how the post-colonial state struggles to align with the post-colonial society, the line of research proposed here may provide us the opportunity to explore the story of the state before post-colonialism. Namely, it would allow us to explore how and why it is perceived the way it is for a people striving for sovereignty in general and the state in particular.

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