

*Reconsidering Terror and Terrorism: The Case for Hamas*

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*"I am drowning; why would I fear being wet?"*

First Communiqué of Hamas

In a scene reminiscent of far too many bloody days, in late February Hamas deployed security forces to the border fence, east of the Jabaliya refugee camp, that separates Israel from the Gaza Strip. But this time, they did not carry guns. With only clubs and batons, the Hamas men closest to the fence were there to deter young Palestinians from throwing rocks at the Israeli soldiers across the barrier.<sup>1</sup>

Hamas remains a permanent actor on the stage of Palestinian politics, and, as the democratically elected government of the Hamas-Gaza state, it is a profoundly different organization than when it was founded in the late 1980s. Despite this calculated evolution in thought and practice, U.S. policy toward Hamas remains dogmatic – out of touch with present realities in Israel and Palestine – and superficial – unable to withstand the scrutiny of any serious analysis.

United States policy toward Hamas must therefore be reconsidered, especially regarding the arbitrary application of the terrorist label. Current policy contributes to the perception that the U.S. is hypocritical and hegemonic, arbitrarily deciding who is labeled terrorist, and sympathetic toward Israelis and apathetic toward Arabs, especially Palestinians. This perception hinders daily the advancement of U.S. policy in the Middle East, denigrates U.S. global credibility, and precludes its ability to advance its interests, especially regarding the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Properly, Hamas should be analyzed through a framework grounded in social movement theory. This framework allows for Hamas to be understood as an organic function of the Palestinian peoples' socio-political grievances, and it provides analytical tools that help elucidate Hamas's inner transformations. Accordingly, Hamas is properly understood as more than just simply a terrorist organization.<sup>2</sup>

As the government of the Hamas-Gaza Hamas is no longer simply a marginal terrorist group operating on the fringes of Palestinian society. This must be clear to United States policy makers: The United States must engage Hamas in order to aid its more moderate

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<sup>1</sup> Fares Akram, "Hamas Chases Protesters From Gaza-Israel Border," *New York Times*, March 1, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth argument along these lines, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Islamic Activism and Social Movement Theory: A New Direction for Research," *Mediterranean Politics* 7:3 (2002), 189-190. See also Glenn E. Robinson, "Hamas as Social Movement," in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 112-142.

members in their legitimate aspirations to rebuild Palestinian society and aid them in stemming the proliferation of Salafi-Jihadi groups operating in the area.

Historically speaking, violence has been only a small portion of what Hamas does. As an activist social movement organization, Hamas's primary focus has been domestic, and it has never associated itself with actual and self-described terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda or any of its regional affiliates or sub groups. Yet Hamas has always been approached by the United States through the lens of terrorism. This is problematic on many counts, but chief among the issues with this myopic approach is that, despite having been engaged in a "War on Terror" for over a decade, the United States does not have an adequate working definition of terror, terrorism, or terrorist. The application of these terms to Hamas in a blanket fashion highlights the problems contained within them.

One of the problems with the 'war on terror' was that it expanded the label 'terrorist' to any person or group who is militant and uses violent methods in their conflicts with their enemies. However, there are different types of militant action groups and the 'terrorist' label is not an accurate one-size-fits-all category. Not even the official U.S. State Department definition of terrorism accounts for the myriad differences and themes contained within the concept of terror. The definition reads: "Premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational or clandestine agents."<sup>3</sup>

Many scholars have described the problems inherent in trying to define terror.<sup>4</sup> One scholar, Dipak Gupta, Professor of Political Science at UCSD, notes that by leaving out the possibility of state-based terror in its current working definition, the United States discounts the facts of history. As defined by the United States, for example, the Reign of Terror, which gave terrorism its name, is not considered terrorism. As Professor Gupta rightly observes, "This definition would, therefore, exclude by far the largest source of civilian death in the world: governments."<sup>5</sup>

In this line of analysis, the current United States definition of terrorism cannot, in fact, be applied to Hamas because since 2006 Hamas has not been a subnational group; rather, it is the legitimate, democratically elected government of the Hamas-Gaza state. Furthermore, by considering Hamas a terrorist organization because it inflicts indiscriminate civilian casualties, the nature of the definition implicitly sanctions the perception that the United States is impartial to Arab suffering, particularly that of the Palestinians, because of the incontrovertible and devastatingly disproportionate number of civilian casualties inflicted upon the Palestinians by the Israeli state.

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<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/2656f>. Accessed December 8, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the best treatment of the problems with defining and understanding terrorism and thus its causes and origins is found in Bruce Hoffman, "Defining Terrorism," in *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Dipak Gupta, *Understanding Terrorism and Political Violence: The life cycle of birth, growth, transformation and demise* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 8 – 10.

A look at the raw data quickly reveals the notion of “noncombatant” or “civilian” deaths as a basis for defining terror, especially in the Palestine-Israel context, to be useless.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that from the beginning of the second intifada in September 2000 until the end of July 2007, more than 4,000 Palestinians and roughly 1,000 Israelis were killed. For every person killed, approximately seven more were injured. Palestinians died in this time period at a rate of at least 4 to 1 versus Israelis.<sup>6</sup>

The total number of Israelis, whether civilian or non-civilian, killed by Palestinians has steadily declined since the formation of Hamas and the first intifada. Israeli casualties peaked in 2002 with more than 400 deaths; the number declined by half in 2003 and half again by 2004 and it has continued to decline since. Conversely, Palestinian casualties have remained high: in 2007, for every one Israeli death there were 25 Palestinian deaths.<sup>7</sup>

Nearly 88 percent of all children killed in this particular period of time studied by OCHA were Palestinian. OCHA notes that, mirroring the total rate of Israeli deaths, the number of Israeli children killed has steadily declined since 2002 while that of Palestinian children remains high. More than 20 percent of all Palestinians killed were children; conversely, Israeli children make up 12 percent of total Israeli deaths. In 2006, 31 percent of the Palestinian children killed were 12 years of age or younger.<sup>8</sup>

The civilian casualty ratio during Operation Cast Lead (27 DEC 2008 – 18 JAN 2009) is no less disparaging. In only three weeks, the Israeli assault killed 1,417 Palestinians, 926 of whom were civilians. B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, notes that more than 300 of these civilians were children less than 18 years of age.<sup>9</sup> To put this into comparative perspective, this is nearly equal to the total number of persons killed (civilian and non-civilian) in all of Afghanistan in 2007.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the United States frequently asserts that Hamas’s use of indiscriminate artillery – namely its use of “Qassam rockets” – is terrorism. Yet, even deaths caused by the use of indiscriminate artillery in this conflict reveal this metric to be anomalous as well. OCHA notes that, between 2004 and 2007, Palestinian armed groups fired 2,696 rockets into Israel; 11 Israelis died, 4 of them children. Conversely, in 2006 alone, Israel fired nearly 14,000 artillery shells into only the Gaza Strip, killing 59 persons. Thus in one year, Israel fired nearly

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<sup>6</sup> “Israeli-Palestinian Fatalities Since 2000 – Key Trends,” United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs, accessed November 5, 2011, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/BE07C80CDA4579468525734800500272>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.btselem.org/download/20090909\\_cast\\_lead\\_fatalities\\_eng.pdf](http://www.btselem.org/download/20090909_cast_lead_fatalities_eng.pdf). Accessed December 8, 2012. B’Tselem notes that the classification of fatalities according to whether the person took part in the hostilities is based on a new approach of the International Committee of the Red Cross, who formulated the approach following six years of study involving experts in international humanitarian law.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 227.

four times as many rounds of artillery than all Palestinian armed groups fired in four years total.<sup>11</sup>

Hamas has historically engaged in the use of suicide terror as a means of calculated armed political contention. Of course, there is no argument that can be made against considering detonating a suicide vest on a bus full of civilians as not an act of barbaric terror, yet Hamas's use of this tactic must be contextualized within the broader framework of the Palestinian conflict. Most importantly, the superficial and myopic approach of the United States toward the conflict has precluded policy makers from recognizing that the use of suicide tactics is a rational political decision carried out within the particular political opportunity structure in Palestine, and that certain changes in the political opportunity structure in Palestine trigger spikes in violence.

The European expert on Hamas Jeroen Gunning notes that many of Israel's political and military decisions lead directly to the rational choice of using suicide terror tactics. For example, between March and December 1996, CPRS polls recorded a rise from 21 percent to 39 percent in public support for suicide attacks. This occurred following "a year of border closures, the stalling of the peace process, and a series of controversial Israeli policies, including the opening of a tunnel under the al-Aqsa Mosque and the building of the controversial Har Homa-Abu Ghnaim settlement."<sup>12</sup>

Despite some surges, though, the number of suicide attacks has drastically declined. According to OCHA there were 45 suicide attacks in 2002; in 2003 there were 20; in 2004 there were 10. The numbers have continually decreased: there were less than 10 in 2005, less than 5 in 2006, and one or two in 2007.<sup>13</sup> The decrease in these numbers highlights the calculated political evolution of Hamas as an organization that, while governing Gaza, has resisted resorting to violence.

Within this context, the most recent episodes of the Hamas-Israel conflict (Operation Cast Lead and Operation Pillar of Defense, to use Israeli labels) have demonstrated the conflict's new nature as an inter-state war between Israel and the Hamas-Gaza state. It is no longer accurate to judge the conflict through the framework of an Israeli police-security action against a local, marginal organization because Hamas is no longer that: it is a state-based political unit that negotiates with Israel and surrounding states daily. Khaled Mashal's speech in December 2012, upon his return to Gaza from exile elsewhere, illustrates the latest stage in Hamas's organizational evolution. The speech demonstrated Mashal as leading a state-based regime - certainly a belligerent one, but a regime nonetheless.<sup>14</sup> The cast of visiting heads of state and other dignitaries to Hamas further demonstrates this.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 217.

<sup>13</sup> "Israeli-Palestinian Fatalities Since 2000 – Key Trends."

<sup>14</sup> For coverage of the speech see Steven Erlanger, "Leader Celebrates Founding of Hamas With Defiant Speech," *New York Times*, December 8, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/world/>

Given all of this, it is no longer appropriate for the United States to disregard Hamas simply as a marginal terrorist organization. As the leading scholar of Islamic movements Dr. John Voll puts it, “Whatever Netanyahu thinks about the ‘two-state solution,’ he and his government have been acting as if Hamas is the government of a state. The two Gaza wars [Pillar of Defense and Cast Lead] were against the Hamas-Gaza state and its citizens – they were not simply security actions against a marginal terrorist organization.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the crucial issues contained within this concept of the Hamas-Gaza state that is being missed by United States policy makers is that since the elections of 2006, Hamas violence against Israel has been nearly non-existent. More importantly, Hamas’s control over Gaza has been weakened by a proliferation of Salafi-Jihadi (and other) groups in Palestine that are militant to the extent of making Hamas as it stands now look pacifist. Netanyahu has made it clear that Hamas is and will continue to be held responsible for any violence emanating from Gaza toward Israel, even if other groups fire the rockets or stage the attack.<sup>16</sup>

The 2009 Gaza War (Cast Lead), for example, began because of an attack claimed by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Moreover, the frequent attacks against Israel in the form of border skirmishes or rockets since 2009 are entirely *not* the work of Hamas.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Hamas is now struggling daily with stemming the proliferation of Salafi-Jihadism, styled after the ideology of Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda, within its ranks. Of particular concern for United States security officials, large numbers of militants are joining the ranks of groups such as Jaysh al-Islam, Jaysh al-Umma, Tawhid wa al-Jihad, Jund Ansar Allah, and Ansar al-Sunna.

Many new members of these groups join them because of their radical opposition to Hamas doing exactly what the United States has claimed it wants: participate in democratic elections, refuse to implement total rule of Sharia law, negotiate cease-fires and other political issues with Israel, and deescalate its use of violence. Hamas’s actions in these regards have opened it up to a challenge from Salafi-Jihadi groups on religious grounds; many of these groups claim that Hamas’s failure to implement true Sharia law combined with its political negotiations with Israel demonstrate it as illegitimately Islamic and unable to establish a true Islamic emirate in Palestine. Furthermore, Hamas’s refusal in recent years to involve itself in the conflict in Syria has augmented its opponents’ criticisms. In light of all this, as noted in a study conducted by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, it should come as no surprise that, “some Salafi-Jihadi groups consist largely of former Hamas members

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[middleeast/khaled-meshal-hamas-leader-delivers-defiant-speech-on-anniversary-celebration.html?pagewanted=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit\\_ae\\_20121208](http://middleeast/khaled-meshal-hamas-leader-delivers-defiant-speech-on-anniversary-celebration.html?pagewanted=1&nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_ae_20121208).

<sup>15</sup> John O. Voll, e-mail message to author, December 9, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Jodi Rudoren, “Israeli Jets Strike Gaza Strip in Response to Rocket Attacks,” *New York Times*, December 26, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/27/world/middleeast/israeli-jets-strike-gaza-strip-in-response-to-rocket-attacks.html>.

<sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group, “Israel and Hamas: Fire and Ceasefire in a New Middle East,” Middle East Report Number 133, November 22, 2012, 1, 3.

disillusioned by the organization's failure to enforce *sharia* vigorously in the Gaza Strip and to use the area as a launching pad for attacks against Israel."<sup>18</sup>

Though the defeat of radical Salafi-Jihadi ideology is a chief strategic interest of the United States, Hamas has received little or no aid in its attempts to crush the ideology's spread in Palestine. Hamas has, in fact, engaged in military operations aimed at mitigating or outright defeating these groups. For example, in mid-August 2009, Hamas raided a mosque affiliated with Jund Ansar Allah and engaged in a fierce battle with its followers. The raid followed a sermon by the Salafi-Jihadist cleric Sheikh Abdul Latif Musa, in which he condemned Hamas and announced Jund Ansar Allah's establishment of an "Islamic emirate" in Palestine.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, in the summer of 2013, Hamas began deploying a 600-man military force throughout the Gaza Strip that operates 24 hours a day in order to prevent rocket fire at Israel. Demonstrating just how serious Hamas is at maintaining the cease-fire with Israel, this force, called *Dabat al-Midan* ("Restraining Force"), receives its orders directly from Mohammad Deif, the head of Hamas's military wing.<sup>20</sup> This has been lost on United States policy makers, who are mired in dogmatic, superficial methods of thinking.

The threat posed by Salafi-Jihadi groups like Jund Ansar Allah is considerable: not only is their existence further radicalizing Palestinian (especially Gazan) society, but they actively attempt to disrupt not only Hamas's negotiations with Israel (for example the 2008 and 2009 cease fires) but larger regional cooperation as well (for example the Morsi-Netanyahu-Hamas-U.S. ceasefire with Israel in 2011).<sup>21</sup> The Israeli security expert Avi Issacharoff has noted that since Morsi's ouster in Egypt, for example, rival Salafi-Jihadi groups in Gaza have been taking advantage of Hamas's weakness. As he puts it, "The pressure on Hamas is rising all the time. Its capacity to prevent rocket fire into Israel by its increasingly emboldened rivals may be falling."<sup>22</sup>

Understanding the threat posed by the proliferation of these groups must be understood by juxtaposing them with Hamas. Hamas is first and foremost a nationalist organization, and its militant side has always been aimed at achieving its strictly political nationalist aspirations of Palestinian statehood. Hamas has never engaged in any violent activity outside the confines of Israel and the Palestinian territories, and Hamas has always

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<sup>18</sup> Yoram Cohen, Matthew Levitt and Becca Wasser, "Deterred but Determined: Salafi-Jihadi Groups in the Palestinian Arena," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #99, January 2010, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 6, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Avi Issacharoff, "Hamas deploys 600-strong force to prevent rocket fire at Israel," *Times of Israel*, June 13, 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-establishes-special-force-to-prevent-rocket-fire/>. See also Avi Issacharoff, "Hamas may be fighting a losing battle to stop Gaza rocket fire," *Times of Israel*, January 24, 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-may-be-fighting-a-losing-battle-to-stop-gaza-rocket-fire/>.

<sup>21</sup> David D. Kirkpatrick and Jodi Rudoren, "Israel and Hamas Agree to a Cease-Fire, After a U.S.-Egypt Push," *New York Times*, November 21, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/22/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-conflict.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/22/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-conflict.html?_r=0).

<sup>22</sup> Fares Akram and Jodi Rudoren, "Gaza Man Shot to Death in Border Clash With Israeli Military, Palestinians Say," *New York Times*, January 25, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/world/middleeast/gaza-man-shot-to-death-in-border-clash-with-israeli-military-palestinians-say.html>.

disassociated itself from al-Qaeda; in fact, al-Qaeda leaders have on numerous occasions made clear their poor regard for Hamas.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to this, the Salafi-Jihadi groups operating in Palestine are direct offshoots of al-Qaeda's radically violent ideology of transnational jihad aimed at establishing a global caliphate. (Hamas, it should be remembered, is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, and its ideology therefore stems from social revitalization, not destruction.) Jund Ansar Allah, as just one example of this stark contrast, directs its messages and calls for violent jihad not only to Palestinians, but to its "mujahedin" in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq, Kashmir, Somalia, and the Philippines, "demonstrating that its members perceive themselves as part of a global jihadist group fighting on multiple fronts."<sup>24</sup>

Hamas has made its efforts at defeating this threat, not only to itself but also to the region, well known. Speaking in response to rocket attacks against Israel carried out by Jaysh al-Islam in 2009, Gaza's health minister, Bassem Naim, despaired that, "everything we've gained could be lost by the actions of a single idiot. These people do more harm than any others to Hamas's cause."<sup>25</sup> One of the long term implications being lost on United States policy makers is that the proliferation of Salafi-Jihadist groups styled in the mold of al-Qaeda will allow Palestine to become a new front for the terrorism of al-Qaeda and its attacks against the United States and its allies.

Militant radicalism will continue to spread in Palestine so long as depravity and anguish are the defining characteristics of life there. Ehud Barak, who served as Israeli Prime Minister after a long military career, stated in response to a reporter who asked whether he would have been a military man in Palestine had he been Palestinian, "What else could I say? If I were a young Palestinian immersed from birth in the Palestinian ethos, I'd have become a third grade teacher?"<sup>26</sup> United States policy has done nothing to re-shape this violent societal ethos in Palestine, especially Gaza; in fact its policies have augmented it. Nor has the United States taken steps to aid in the rebuilding of a politico-socio-economic system with the capacity for moderation and negotiation rather than extremism and violence. In fact, United States policy in Palestine marks the first time in which an occupied people have been subjected to international sanctions.<sup>27</sup>

Because the United States considers Hamas a terrorist organization, United States policy in Palestine has revolved around the West Bank. Despite the Palestinian elections that brought Hamas to power in a democratic fashion having been described as "free, fair, and secure", the United States considered them to be "disconcerting", a "political tsunami", or

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<sup>23</sup> Cohen, Levitt and Wasser, "Deterred but Determined", 30.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 22. See also Hassan Jabr, "Jund Ansar Allah: New Salafi Organization Appears in Southern Part of Gaza Strip," BBC International Monitoring, *al-Ayyam*, December 23, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group, "Radical Islam in Gaza," Middle East Report Number 104, March 29, 2011, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000) xv.

<sup>27</sup> International Crisis Group, "After Mecca: Engaging Hamas," Middle East Report Number 62, February 28, 2007, 3.

“an enormous, unpredictable, destructive wave.”<sup>28</sup> In light of this, on June 15, 2007, the *New York Times* published that U.S. policy was to seek the overthrow of Hamas by preventing contact between the West Bank and “the infection of Gaza.”<sup>29</sup> This strategy is now commonly referred to as the “West Bank First” (WBF) strategy, and it has had an incontrovertible function in allowing the proliferation of Salafi-Jihadi groups in Palestine and the further radicalization of society there.

As noted Palestinian economist Dr. Mohammed Samhuri noted, “By imposing international financial and economic sanctions and attaching conditions to desperately needed aid, the [WBF strategy] aimed to compel Palestinians to overthrow the government they had democratically elected and embrace one they had clearly rejected. [The U.S.] was unwilling to accept, or incapable of understanding, that Fatah had been defeated politically for its years of corruption and ineptitude and that no amount of coercion could reverse that.” The impact of this strategy “was immediate, profound, and almost destructive in nature”, and resulted in dire unintended consequences for the United States, namely, the proliferation of Salafi-Jihadi groups in the region allied with al-Qaeda.<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Samhuri notes that close to 80 percent of Gaza’s population is unable to feed itself without external assistance. Yet international sanctions have allowed in only enough external assistance to keep Gaza’s population barely alive. Until 2012, no international public or private investment was allowed in.<sup>31</sup> The destructiveness of this policy has contributed to rising radicalism and violence in Gaza. According to OCHA, in 2005, 52 percent of all deaths from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict occurred in Gaza. In 2007, fatalities in Gaza represented 67 percent of the total. Similarly, in 2005, 58 percent of deaths from internal violence occurred in Gaza; this number increased in 2007 to 95 percent.<sup>32</sup> As Karen Konig Abu Zayd of the United Nations cogently put it, “It is especially frightening to see the impact of prolonged crises one very aspect of the Palestinian body politic: the deterioration of law and order; the unraveling of community cohesion; the rise in crime and internal violence; and the increasing radicalization of youth in an environment of economic and political hopelessness.”<sup>33</sup>

The failure of United States officials to properly understand Hamas’s function in Palestinian politics is confirmed by Alvaro de Soto, the former UN Envoy to the Middle East, in which he stated:

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<sup>28</sup> Staff Trip Report, “Palestinian Legislative Council Elections – Challenges of Hamas’s Victory” (Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, January 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Isabel Kershner and Steven Erlanger, “Palestinian Split Deepens; Government in Chaos,” *New York Times*, June 15 2007, accessed December 8, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/15/world/middleeast/15mideast.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/15/world/middleeast/15mideast.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>30</sup> Mohammed Samhuri, “The ‘West Bank First’ Strategy: A Political-Economy Critical Assessment” (Working Paper 2, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, 2007), 9.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/qatar-funds-major-project-to-rebuild-gaza-1.470405>

<sup>32</sup> “Israeli-Palestinian Fatalities Since 2000 – Key Trends,” United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs. To a large extent, this violence was sponsored directly by the United States. See David Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell,” *Vanity Fair*, April 2008, <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804>.

<sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group, “After Mecca,” 3. See also United Nations Relief and Works Agency, “Prolonged Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Socio-Economic Impacts of the New Phase on Refugees and Non-refugees”, 2006, foreword.



“At the time [2006-2007]... the US clearly pushed for a confrontation between Fateh and Hamas – so much so that, a week before Mecca, the US envoy declared twice in an envoy’s meeting in Washington how much ‘I like this violence,’ referring to the near-civil war that was erupting in Gaza in which civilians were being regularly killed and injured, because ‘it means that other Palestinians are resisting Hamas.’”<sup>34</sup>

de Soto’s quote demonstrates the dogmatic approach of the United States toward Hamas and its failure to adapt to changing realities in Palestine, especially regarding the concept of terror and political violence. Applying the label of terrorist to Hamas must be dramatically reconsidered. The analytical problems with this superficial policy have been outlined above, yet this trenchant position is also affecting the lives of innocent people daily and driving them into the arms of Salafi-Jihadi groups that pose a far more significant risk to global geo-politics and US interest than does Hamas. As Harvard researcher Sara Roy notes from her first-hand experience in Gaza, because of the US-sponsored terrorist label, “USAID, for example, permits no assistance of any kind to go to the Hams-controlled Ministry of Health in Gaza, although the ministry must urgently meet the health needs of hundreds of thousands of people.”<sup>35</sup>

The preceding analyses should not be taken as deriving from sympathy for the Gazan people. Rather, these analyses demonstrate that the United States has directly contributed to an environment in Palestine and perceptions in the Middle East that will continue to plague its interests there for generations. The general framework of the argument in this work intersects directly with United States strategic interests and vision in the Middle East of a democratic and stable region. Achieving these interest will continue to falter so long as the United States is hypocritical regarding its own stated principles; the United States must accept democratically elected governments as legitimate representatives of the people who choose them, regardless of whether the elected government is not whom the U.S. wished for.

Religion is and will remain a powerful force shaping events and social movements in the Middle East. The failure of the United States to engage “Islamists”, and instead to brand them as terrorists – as is the case with Hamas – is indicative of the myopic lack of cultural and historical awareness plaguing the U.S. foreign and national security policy establishment. Creating policy in the Middle East without including the function of religion – or attempting to solve the Israel-Palestine issue without including the function of Hamas – is a bit like trying to bake a chocolate cake with all the ingredients except chocolate, to borrow a phrase from Jack Jacobs:

You’ll get *something*, but it won’t be what you want. It’s much better to wait until you have all the ingredients.  
Or better yet, skip dessert altogether.

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<sup>34</sup> Roy, *Hamas*, 42-43.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

You'll live longer.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jack Jacobs and Douglas Century, *If Not Now, When? Duty and Sacrifice in America's Time of Need* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2008), 254.