Portuguese Journal
of International Affairs

ipris   ISG
Escola de Gestão   REN
Redes Energéticas Nacionais   galp
energia   edp

Aims and scope

The *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* is a refereed journal specializing in the politics, foreign policies and security-related issues of Portugal and its wider geostrategic area.

The aims of the *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* are twofold: to bring readers outstanding general scholarship and provide an outlet for scholars working on the international relations of Portugal and its wider geostrategic area. The journal will be circulated to all foreign embassies in Portugal as well as to all Portuguese embassies abroad, hundreds of libraries, universities and think tanks around the world.

The *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* will focus on: the relations between the Portuguese speaking countries; the relations between the Portuguese speaking countries and the rest of the world; and general issues of politics, international relations and security that have a bearing on one or more of the Portuguese speaking countries. The journal will be open to all methodological approaches and schools of thought. Among the topics that fall within the journal's focus are:

- Portugal's economic diplomacy
- Transatlantic relations between the US and Portugal
- Angola's regional role in Africa
- Reform of the UN: Brazil and the Security Council
- Brazil's regional role
- Transition to democracy in Guinea-Bissau
- Mozambique and SADC
- Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP)
- East Timor and ASEAN
- EU and Cape Verde
- Macau after 1999
- China and the African Portuguese speaking countries
- São Tomé and Príncipe and the Gulf of Guinea
- Maghreb and the EU energy security strategy
- BRIC's: a new bloc?
- NATO and African Union

Copyright and offprints

It is a condition of publication in the *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* that authors grant copyright to IPRIS. This ensures that requests from third parties to reproduce articles are handled efficiently and consistently and will also allow the article to be as widely disseminated as possible. In assigning copyright, authors may use their own material in publications provided that the *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* is acknowledged as the original place of publication, and IPRIS is notified in writing and in advance. In consideration for assignment of copyright, IPRIS will supply the author with a PDF file of the article and a hard copy of the *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs*.

Subscriptions

Annual subscription price (2009): institutions, 90€ in Europe and 120€ elsewhere; individuals 45€ in Europe and 60€ elsewhere. Single issues are available for 50€. Prices include postage. Payment may be made by cheque (payable to IPRIS). Please contact IPRIS at the above address for further details.

Advertising

Advertising is welcomed. Contact IPRIS at the above address for further details.

Article submission

The *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs* invites original contributions meeting the journal's aims and scope. All papers will be subject to anonymous peer review, and will be evaluated on the basis of their creativity, quality of scholarship, and contribution to advancing the understanding of the international relations of Portugal and its wider geostrategic area. Papers should be submitted to:

Paulo Gorjão
Editor, *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs*
Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)
Rua Vitorino Nemésio, 5
1750-306 Lisboa
PORTUGAL
Email: ipris@ipris.org

Submissions will be dealt with promptly, and the editors will communicate a first decision to contributors within six weeks of submission. Detailed notes follow:

1. The maximum length of articles, including endnotes, is 4500 words.

2. Subheadings should be used to clarify and divide the structure of the articles; if more than one level of subheadings is used, they must be clearly differentiated. Subheadings should not be numbered.

3. The author's name, institutional affiliation, and full contact details (postal, phone, fax, and email) should be provided on a separate sheet.

4. Endnotes should be avoided, or kept to a minimum. Authors should pay particular attention to the accuracy and correct presentation of endnotes. Examples:

   Books and monographs: Maria Raquel Freire, *Conflict and Security in the Former Soviet Union: The Role of the Osce* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 45.

   Edited books: Alexandra Barahona de Brito, Carmen González-Enríquez and Paloma Aguilar (eds.), *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice in Democratizing Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

   Chapters in books: Manuel Ennes Ferreira, "China in Angola: Just a Passion for Oil?", in Christopher Alden, Daniel Large and Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (eds.), *China Returns to Africa: A Rising Power and a Continent Embrace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 295-317.

   Articles in journals: Paulo Gorjão, "Japan's Foreign Policy and East Timor, 1975–2002" (*Asian Survey*, Vol. 42, No. 5, September/October 2002), pp. 754-771.

   Articles in newspapers: Paulo Gorjão, "UN needs coherent strategy to exit from East Timor" (*Jakarta Post*, 19 May 2004), p. 25.

5. Diagrams and tables should be avoided, or kept to a minimum.

Hamas: Do Tactical Shifts Imply Ideological Changes?

DIOGO NOIVO
Researcher for the Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Security (IPRIS)

Introduction

Since its foundation, Hamas has gradually acquired a significant political role in both internal Palestinian politics and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The 2006 elections were a milestone in this growth process as they gave Hamas a solid stance in governance. But more importantly, the Palestinian elections generalized the debate about Islamists' possible ideological moderation. Subsequently, many events have again led academic scholars and policy makers to discuss Hamas's eventual political opening and the resulting opportunities for peace in the Middle East. This debate revolves around a number of different aspects, but most of them directly related to the nature and *modus operandi* of Hamas. Therefore, in order to assure a comprehensive understanding of the topic, issues such as Hamas's origins, its ideology and political actions must be scrutinized. Through this analysis we can understand more fully whether these signs of moderation are tactical calculations or the advent of a new identity.

History and Ideological Structure

Hamas was formally created in 1987 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestinian branch, its name being an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya* (Islamic Resistance Movement). One of the Movement's key founders, Sheik Amed Yassin, became affiliated with the Brotherhood while studying in Cairo, and upon his return to Gaza opened an Islamic Center in 1973 which was the embryo of Hamas.

  The Muslim Brotherhood has played a large role in modern Arab politics. Known in Arabic as *Ikhwan*, the Brotherhood spanned Asia, Europe and Africa, and formed the basis for the majority of the Islamist political parties and movements in the Arab world today. Its founder, Hassan al-Banna, a prominent Egyptian ideologist and one of forefathers of modern Islamism, created the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Its origins are clearly related

to Egypt's socio-political environment at the time, but not restricted to that reality. Banna witnessed political events – such as the end of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of a secular Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the establishment of a pro-British monarchy in his own country – and was influenced by some of the most important *salafi* doctrines, leading him to start an organization that aimed at a revival of the wealth he perceived in the Koran and the *Hadiths*.[1]

For Banna, Islam was much more than a religious belief; it was a global conception of the world that permeated all aspects of life.[2] Therefore, according to Banna, all problems are explained by the denying or subsidence of faith. Banna demonized Western culture and lifestyles, therefore his solution was to counter secular tendencies in the Muslim world by imposing theocratic states, ruled under the Book and Traditions, through *sharia*.[3] Although the priority was to undermine and depose 'apostate' regimes in Muslim countries, the ultimate goal was – at least theoretically – to attain the global *umma*.[4] The jihad, both in its spiritual/intimate and violent senses, is the way to this goal.

Today, the Brotherhood's agenda is a non-violent one. Many of the *Ikhwan's* offshoots apparently undertook an exclusively democratic path. Nonetheless, in the ideological realm, its Islamist nature is still well defined. In Europe, for example, the Brotherhood seeks to politicize European Muslims, leading them into voting blocs that advocate *sharia* tribunals for civil and domestic matters, trying to roll back such secular achievements as gay rights and gender equality in a quest to create a deep schism between Muslims and non-Muslims.[5] It is not, in fact, violence promotion, but it is certainly an appeal to intolerance that is far from democracy's underlying values. Furthermore, abiding by democracy's rules of procedure has led to ideological dilemmas on issues such as legitimacy – which, for Islamists, derives from Allah and not from majorities. The Brotherhood fought against Israel in the 1948 war and, once the conflict ended, the Gaza branches fell under Egyptian rule while the West Bank came under Jordanian jurisdiction. Egypt severely repressed the Brotherhood, while in the West Bank, the Hashemite Monarchy provoked internal disputes, co-opting the moderates and incarcerating the radical faction. The aftermath was a barely surviving Brotherhood in the West Bank and an Islamist group in Gaza hardened by oppression. This explains why Hamas has always been stronger in Gaza.

As a branch of an older organization, it isn't surprising that there is an almost complete overlap between Hamas's and the Brotherhood's doctrines and aspirations. The Movement fully embraces its parenthood, but it adapted the Brotherhood's broad agenda to its regional necessities. In other words, Hamas abides by a pan-Islamist logic, and its contribution to such a broad venture begins with the implementation of a Islamic theocracy in the former British Mandatory Palestine (Gaza, Israel and the West Bank). Above and beyond, the reformism that could be seen in some of the Brotherhood's affiliates never filtered through to Hamas's leading ranks, as they have remained focused on two

defining goals: eliminating Israel and replacing the secular Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Palestinian Authority (PA) as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.[6]

Hence, Hamas operates according to a tripartite strategy: establishing a political alternative to the PLO and PA; carrying out social welfare programs to create popular support; and undertaking military activities designed to target Israeli soldiers and civilians. For each component there is a correspondent wing of the organization, responsible for carrying out the delineated goals. The military wing, where we can find the *Izz al-Din al-Qassam* Brigades, is also responsible for capturing, interrogating and killing Palestinians who collaborate with Israel. The three wings that compose Hamas are deeply intertwined at both a human resources and an objectives level. The success of one wing is impossible without a similar triumph by the other two in their missions. Furthermore, operatives circulate between wings. The strategic and operational aspects of all three arms are controlled by the *Majlis al-Shura*, or Political Council, located in Damascus.

An often overlooked part of Hamas's quest is the *dawa*, the core of its social welfare wing, also a legacy of the Muslim Brotherhood. Muslims are required to spread true Islam, where charity is an essential element. The *zaqat*, or the act of giving alms, is one of Islam's five pillars, attributing to social assistance a leading place in religious practice. The *dawa* derives from this notion, but it is used by many Islamists for political purposes:

"[It] covers a wide spectrum of outreach activity, from outright proselytizing (which benefits the soul) to charitable giving and social welfare activities (which benefit the body). [...] Within the more radical *Salafi* strain of Sunni Islam, *dawa* activities are seen as protecting the *umma* [...] from insufficient Islamic rulers and other perceived enemies of Islam, such as non-Muslim infidels. [...] By focusing on impressionable youth and in areas lacking social welfare services, the Brotherhood's Islamic institutions serve as 'functional substitutes for the welfare apparatus of the State and constitute a natural and familiar setting in which young activists can reach out to uncommitted peers'. In other words, social services institutions function as an ideal tool used by Islamists to radicalize and recruit Muslim youth".[7]

There is nothing altruistic about Hamas's *dawa,* and a good example is that within a family only the pro-Hamas members are entitled to food and medical supplies.[8]

Misinformation efforts led part of the international community to believe there was no connection between wings. The social welfare wing was seen as merely humanitarian, and as a consequence it was financially supported by some Western countries and organizations. In addition to aiding the political branch with propaganda and recruitment, the *dawa* structure is also responsible for providing sanctuary to wanted terrorists, as well as laundering and transferring money later used to finance terrorist activities.

However, despite this strong organizational structure, events occurring over the last few years have raised questions about the possibility of dissidence within Hamas, or even about an ideological transformation.

Dissonant Signals

Hamas's decision to take part in electoral processes inaugurated the debate on whether the Movement is undergoing a reform. The December 2005 local elections and the January 2006 legislative elections are milestones for Hamas as a political actor due to the fact that it had previously refused to participate in elections, and also because for the most extremist forms of Islamism, taking part in the democratic process is ideologically unacceptable. Both elections were won by Hamas, a result received with some surprise. Several factors explain this electoral outcome.

The reason usually offered to explain the electoral victory centers on the fact that Yasser Arafat invested much time and energy internationalizing the Palestinian cause, leaving a power vacuum in the territories. Although true, the issue is more complex than that. In 1982, after Israel invaded Lebanon, Arafat's Fatah suffered a blow to its credibility and lost part of its political leverage. Later, the first intifada in 1987 caused internal rifts within Fatah and introduced Islamism as a driving force in the conflict – one which gained strength in the following year after Arafat was forced to denounce violence and recognize Israel. Moreover, Palestinians understood that under Fatah, patronage was the rule of law. Corruption spread without any significant political or social achievements for the residents of the West Bank and Gaza, and the PLO was seen as incapable of undertaking a restructuring process. This provided a perfect opening to implement *dawa's* framework.

Hamas profited from Fatah's political absence on the streets, since it already had a well implemented welfare/proselytizing wing that generated a parallel society and its corresponding shadow government. In contrast, Fatah never had welfare assistance as a priority and, in certain moments, even benefited from underdevelopment – playing up its victimhood on the international stage and inciting Palestinians against Israel. On a different level, Hamas also took advantage of a new electoral system that favored pro-Hamas districts. Apart from reasons that may be considered systemic or historical, Hamas also acquired political weight due to several extemporaneous events. For example, in August 2005, when Israel unilaterally pulled out of Gaza, 84% of Palestinians saw it as a victory of violence, perceiving the use of force as a successful policy.[9]

As expected, Hamas's participation in the 2006 election was harshly criticized by al-Qaeda, with bin Laden's most preeminent lieutenant, Ayman al-Zawahiri, questioning the Movement's Islamist credentials. Similar censuring happened when Hamas joined Fatah in a short-lived national unity government, as a result of the Saudi-brokered Mecca Agreements of February 2007.

When an Islamist movement with a binding ideology – historically committed to destroying Israel and imposing a theocratic regime – accepts democratic methods and defies a giant of violent Islamism like al-Qaeda, doubts emerge about its allegiance to its

foundational objectives. It could mean that Hamas recognized all treaties signed with Israel, as well as political pluralism. It could also mean that Hamas implicitly renounced both violence and the establishment of the world *umma*. And one could hope the inherent responsibility of governing would leverage reformists and isolate hardliners. But the events that have occurred since 2006 lead us to a different analysis.

Shortly after the elections, the international community, through the 'Quartet',[10] set three conditions to be met by Hamas: respect past agreements, recognize Israel and renounce violence. Given Hamas's ideological and political commitments, these were merely provisions for stability and trust, both regionally and internationally. Hamas rejected all three, and as a result, the Palestinian Authority was placed under economic sanctions, which exacerbated an already poor financial situation. The lack of economic resources led first to delays and then to the suspension of salaries, which caused several public sector strikes. Governing became close to impossible for Hamas as lawlessness spread, and living standards deteriorated. Although recognizing financial recovery as a priority, Hamas increased the amount of religious education in schools and, while it denied responsibility for the attacks, several music stores and pharmacies that sold birth control pills were destroyed and women without headscarves were assaulted. It is highly probable that these events were perpetrated by Hamas members or by local jihadist groups instigated by the Movement. But even if Hamas had nothing to do with these attacks, it is unquestionable that these actions were at least tolerated by the ones whose responsibility it is to preserve law and order.

During this period, Hamas relied on armed clashes and welfare organizations in order to maintain public acceptance, rewarding loyalists and punishing opponents. Clashes between Fatah and Hamas became frequent because both parties were driven by sentiments of revenge and by the objective of mutual undermining. In addition, both struggled for control of the security sector, spawning chaos, impunity and the proliferation of armed militias on the streets. As it fought for control, Hamas created a new parallel security branch whose main purpose was to provide legal cover for the violent *al-Qassam* Brigades. Gaza and the West Bank were pulled apart, essentially splitting into two different and autonomous political entities.

For Hamas, the elections were an opportunity to transform social recognition into a political mandate that could bring them one step closer to fulfilling their agenda of taking Fatah out of the equation. Even in it most violent manifestations, Islamism is highly flexible and pragmatic despite its aggressive and stiff rhetoric, allowing multiple alliances of convenience, as shown for example by the financial and material aid received by the Sunni, *salafist* Hamas from the Shiite Islamic Republic of Iran. The ends justify all means, even if it requires adopting the procedures of the so hated democracy. For Islamists, according to Professor Bernard Lewis, "democracy, expressing the will of the people, is the road to power, but it is a one-way road, on which there is no return, no rejection of the sovereignty

of God, as exercised through His chosen representatives. Their electoral policy has been classically summarized as 'one man (men only), one vote, once'".[11] Violent Islamism demonizes the western way of life as well as its products, but does not hesitate to use the internet in order to radicalize potential operatives. Despite intolerance of other political regimes, Islamism has a heterogeneous reality, where practical necessities and political circumstances play into their *realpolitik*.[12] This is the key to understanding the following episodes that, like the elections, fueled the debate over Hamas's possible moderation.

In February 2007, Saudi Arabia proposed an agreement aimed at restoring living conditions in Gaza, mitigating tensions between Hamas and Fatah, and loosening international sanctions. The Mecca Agreements culminated in the creation of a national unity government, but failed to address one of the key elements of dispute: the security sector. Financial aid was resumed, sanctions reviewed, and leadership of the government went to Hamas, but the Movement continued to refuse to comply with international requirements. Once again, Hamas was accused of instigating or at least tolerating jihadist groups responsible for restarting rocket attacks into Israel. Instead of improving, political conditions got worse.

The fight for hegemony over the territories continued, as did the worsening of economic and security situations. The Mecca Agreement period ended in June 2007 with Hamas' Gaza takeover. With notorious brutality, Hamas overran the PA's security facilities and Fatah centers, occupied Gaza's presidential compound, and summarily executed several Fatah members. Looking into the Movement's tactics and material conditions, a certain degree of premeditation can be confirmed. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas dismissed the national unity government and declared a state of emergency. Hamas's Gaza crackdown caused further disintegration, impelling society to collapse. The West Bank and Gaza became truly divided, Fatah and Hamas each with territorial bases, but with limited control over them.

So why did Hamas accept the Mecca Agreement? As mentioned before, Hamas was unable to deliver as a government, and the public was well aware it. The inability to tackle Palestinians' problems and the consequent loss of popular support curtailed most of Hamas's political weight. Furthermore, the economic situation was strangling the group, so financial aid was desperately needed. Fatah's opposition made it all the more difficult. Mecca resumed financial aid, demonstrated to the public and the international community that Hamas was more than a belligerent group – debunking the majority of the arguments against them – and provided the time and stability required to successfully continue undermining Fatah's political legitimacy. When the situation did not improve, the Gaza crackdown allowed Hamas to reestablish its political leverage through effective control, as well as promote and exploit internal disputes within Fatah.

Of course Fatah has its own responsibility in what happened before and after Mecca. But while Fatah had already given evidence of reliability and commitment to the demo-

cratic process, Hamas has not. Hence, all eyes and expectations were on Hamas, and the Movement knew it. Considering this, Hamas lost two opportunities for providing sound elements of moderation. Instead, all it did was demonstrate that both the elections and the Mecca Agreements were tactical moves and not signals of political change.

From a public relations perspective, Hamas's discourse was and still is rather duplicitous. The Movement's leader, Khaled Mishal, and other Hamas officials have often spoken about coexistence with Israel, albeit never explicitly recognizing its right to exist. They have also advocated a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while later arguing that violence is a pillar of Hamas's existence that will allow the group to recover its legitimate territories. This ambiguous line of communication is, in part, a result of hardliners and moderates debating within Hamas, but does not denote a profound change, and, concerning peacemaking, there is not a significant difference between the two.[13]

There is an important tactical dimension to publicizing apparently inconsistent ideas. In addition to rhetorical mixed signals, Hamas's lack of ideological revision can also be verified in the media. In 2007, Al Aqsa Television, which functions as the Hamas's media branch, produced a children's program whose main character was Farfur, a Mickey Mouse lookalike. Farfur preached "we will return the Islamic community to its former greatness and liberate Jerusalem, God willing, liberate Iraq, God willing" and incited anti-Semitic feelings among the audience.[14] After protests erupted, Al Aqsa TV decided to stop broadcasting the show and the solution found was having Farfur beaten to death by an Israeli agent. The death of this controversial character was followed by an intervention from Saara, the presenter, saying that "Farfur was martyred defending his land".[15]

The debate over Hamas's alleged moderation has been on-and-off the political and academic agendas since 2006, reemerging with special intensity after particular episodes. As of this article, the most recent event happened on the 15th of August 2009, when Hamas attacked and disbanded a jihadist group in Gaza. The Jund Ansar Allah (JAA), an al-Qaeda inspired group, shared Hamas's ideological principles and goals, so the onslaught was perceived by some in the West as a sign of the Movement's engagement with peace-seeking partners in the form of fighting terrorism. However, as in previous occasions, this does not seem to be the case.

For quite some time, and especially after the 2006 elections, al-Qaeda's proxies tried to establish a foothold in the Palestinian territories. Both before and after Mecca, Hamas tolerated and promoted several jihadist groups who were useful as scapegoats for attacks, all the while keeping them under tight surveillance. These jihadist factions pressured Fatah and Israel, and enforced Islamist principles, allowing Hamas to claim it bore neither the responsibility nor had the means to control them. Militant jihadists collaborated with Hamas as well in several activities, such as the kidnappings of Israel Defense Forces soldier Gilad Shalit in 2006 and of BBC reporter Alan Johnston in 2007.

However, as time passed and events unfolded, generalized social and economic chaos strengthened the jihadists' position. Due to the fact that charitable support and security were urgently needed and Hamas was unable to deliver, jihadists invested in *dawa* policies and in local militias, undermining the ruling Movement's already damaged credibility – exactly what Hamas had done to grow decades ago. Jihadist groups gradually filled the vacuum left by Hamas. Operation Cast Lead, conducted by Israel in Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009, deteriorated Hamas's image even more. On the one hand, it became more obvious that the Movement was incapable of governing, and on the other, Hamas deepened Gazans' feelings of insecurity and lack of trust in their government by using Palestinians as human shields during the combat.

Furthermore, criticism from al-Qaeda targeting Hamas evolved into a call for defection. An example, among many, happened when Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, al-Qaeda's leader in Iraq, denounced what he perceived as an Islamic betrayal, and urged Hamas's military wing to join al-Qaeda's groups.[16] The offer had little traction but it is still a cause of alarm for Hamas. Thus, jihadists became Hamas's declared enemies, posing a direct threat to the Movement. The Jund Ansar Allah (JAA), or Soldiers of Allah, a relatively small organization ideologically affiliated to al-Qaeda, was one of these groups. Led by Abdel-Latif Moussa, also known as Abu al Nour al Maqdissi, the JAA vocally criticized Hamas's political decisions. The JAA argued that by failing to impose sharia and establish an Islamic state, Hamas was no different from any other secular political party. Tensions built up between the two organizations until the JAA directly challenged Hamas's authority and its Islamic credentials, showing a clear intent to undermine it.

In a communiqué, the JAA unilaterally declared the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in Gaza under its command, calling all residents to quickly pronounce allegiance and also appealing to Muslims from around the world to support the new leadership with manpower, financial aid and weaponry.[17] It was a clear provocation, and above all an attack on the core of Hamas's identity: its Salafist credentials. Under mounting pressure, Hamas could not tolerate such an obvious and direct threat, which was particularly dangerous due to the Movement's difficulty in maintaining control over Gaza and, simultaneously, its own internal cohesion. Thus on the15[th] of August 2009, Hamas stormed the Ibn-Taymiyah mosque, used as the headquarters of the JAA in an attack resulting in approximately twenty casualties from both Hamas and the JAA, including Sheik Moussa. The small jihadist group disappeared and Hamas gained empathy from some Western analysts and policy makers.

The JAA was just another jihadist group among many inspired by al-Qaeda's ideas. It was not bin Laden's al-Qaeda, also known as "al-Qaeda Central", nor an overwhelming military force. Hamas's assault was simply an effort to maintain political control and ideological credibility. Therefore it cannot be read as a resolute step aimed at fighting al-Qaeda or terrorism in general.

Apart from the domestic reasons previously explained, there is also a diplomatic angle to Hamas's crackdown on the JAA. U.S. President Barack Obama presented a new approach to foreign policy, declaring an intention to dialogue with all political actors regardless of their purposes or, to a certain extent, their actions; in other words, to talk to both friends and foes. In addition, and pertaining to the fight against terrorism, the White House sent an ambiguous message when it tried to repair the previous Administration's mistakes and "transformed" the War on Terror into the War on al-Qaeda – theoretically opening an opportunity to engage with Islamist terrorists with no relation with al-Qaeda, such as Hamas, though keeping the Movement on the terrorist organizations list.

Then there was Fatah's national congress on the 4th of August, the first held in twenty years. One of the main goals of this congress was to rejuvenate the party, seeking to accomplish internal reform in order to further erase the image of corruption and political stagnation. Although keeping resistance as an option, Mahmoud Abbas said Palestinians sought peace with Israel. Fatah was unable to address all the pressing issues on the agenda, but this congress gave the Palestinian party renewed political clout, making it a preferable interlocutor for an American administration that defined the Middle East as one of the country's diplomatic priorities. Hamas does not want to be left behind and had to ensure a place at the negotiation table. Eliminating the JAA was not a gesture of political commitment or, at least, another action that stimulated the preexisting debate about Hamas's ideological change, making Hamas a more viable political partner.

Conclusion

For Hamas, terrorism is a political instrument, not a political objective. Hence, when a group or state that usually resorts to terrorism adopts a different behavior, it constitutes a change of the means, not necessarily of the ends. Such variation could represent a mere tactical shift, or something more structural, like ideological change. However, a profound modification will naturally provide more elements than simply a new behavior. It will also bring a new line of thought. In the case of Hamas, this new behavior appears suddenly and is therefore not consistent in time. The institutional speech is, at best, momentarily incoherent.

As many have written, Hamas is not a monolithic entity, and dissonant voices heard from within Hamas over the last few years support that statement. However, the central element for political analysis is that on one hand, these voices are usually outside the leading organisms and, on the other, the events analyzed in this article were conducted and managed by the movement's traditional hard-line sector. Both the elections and the crackdown on the JAA happened at very specific political junctures where Hamas had clear benefits in showing signs that could be interpreted as moderation. Those same

junctures and the events that followed the point in the direction of tactical opportunism and not towards a new ideological framework.

As always, peacemaking in the Middle East requires a delicate balance. According to contemporary conflict resolution theories, it is difficult to end a conflict without engaging those who are involved in it; Despite this, everyone must save face and thus negotiation cannot be seen as a path leading to the triumph of violence. Diplomatic negotiations are diversified and complex, with the parties having to be committed to finding a solution, regardless of what each one of them proposes. When a party uses negotiation and political overtures as a tactical maneuver to further its own agenda, theory calls it a spoiler. Until now, Hamas has been such a spoiler. Policy makers must be careful when interpreting Hamas's actions, not only because of the Movement's historical record, but also due to its binding ideology, which appears unlikely to change meaningfully anytime soon.

(Endnotes)

1   Oral Traditions that report episodes of Mahomet's life.
2   Luis de la Corte Ibáñez and Javier Jordán, *La yihad terrorista* (Madrid: Editorial Sintesis, 2007), pp. 60-61
3   Islamic Law.
4   Islamic community/nation.
5   Jonathan Paris, "A framework for understanding radical Islam's challenge to European Governments" (*Hudson Institute Transatlantic Issues*, Nº15, May 7 2007).
6   See Hamas's Charter.
7   Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the service of Jihad* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 16-17.
8   "After Mecca: Engaging Hamas" (*International Crisis Group*, Middle East Report No. 62, February 2007), p. 8.
9   Khalil Shikaki, "Sweeping victory, uncertain mandate" (*Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 3, July 2006), pp. 121-122.
10 United States of America, Russian Federation, European Union and the United Nations.
11 Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (London: Phoenix, 2003), p. 96.
12 Walid Phares, *The War of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.71.
13 Matthew Levitt, "Hamas's ideological crisis" (*Hudson Institute*, Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World, November 6, 2009).
14 "Palestinian Hamas takes Mickey" (*BBC News*, May 9, 2007).
15 "Hamas 'Mickey Mouse' killed off" (*BBC News*, June 30, 2007).
16 "Audio statement from Abu Omar al-Baghdadi" (*NEFA Foundation*, February 13, 2009).
17 "Jund Ansar Allah declares 'Islamic Emirate' in Gaza" (*NEFA Foundation*, August 14, 2009).