



## PERSPECTIVES

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# Hamas: Another Failed Palestinian Organization

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Mounting evidence suggests that Hamas, viewed as either a terrorist movement or as a government, is one more failed Palestinian organization. It is recognized as such by Gaza's inhabitants, who no longer show up to their rallies. Its lack of popularity is one reason for the small concessions contained in its recently published document. More concessions will come as popular pressure mounts. Israel should be patient, as time is on its side.

As dovish Israelis seek signs that Hamas is about to modify its bigoted anti-Semitic covenant, evidence is accumulating that Hamas is yet another failed Palestinian organization on a long list of similar organizations. Their collective failure adds up to the failure of the Palestinian national movement as a whole.

The signposts of failure are easy to spot. The Hamas movement – which, since it took over Gaza in 2007, is now the Hamas government – has failed in both its major objectives. The first of these is *muqawama*, or “resistance” (in reality, the quest to destroy the State of Israel). The second is the governing of Gaza.

Few terrorist movements in the world were touted as so major and threatening a military force as Hamas, especially by Israeli opinion makers, military analysts, and the official military establishment. Hamas's strategy of *muqawama* became a buzzword to denote a long-term threat to Israel's security. Overlooked was the fact that *muqawama* was a strategy employed long ago by Fatah, its rival, with motley results.

In retrospect, the Hamas resistance was even less successful. Fatah and the PLO, which the faction once controlled, recognized the weakness of long-term terrorist attrition when Arafat gave the green light to the Oslo process. He

signed on to a provisional Palestinian autonomy in Judea and Samaria/the West Bank after having assassinated numerous advocates of that route. His reversion to mass terrorism during the second intifada, while initially successful, proved to be a disaster from which the local population has yet to recover. The Oslo process took place 29 years after its official inception.

Hamas, though presumed to be more radical than Fatah and to have longer staying power because of its religious ardor, has proved less resilient than its competitor. Following the third round of the Israel-Hamas conflict in the summer of 2014, missile launchings and tunnel attacks on Israel have come to an almost complete halt. (In the years preceding the 2014 round, Hamas and the other factions launched on average 1,500 rockets a year. Since the summer of 2014, that number has dwindled to 25 a year, and they are almost always launched by salafi movements that chafe under Hamas rule.) This dramatic slowdown seems to indicate that “resistance”, while remaining a rhetorical device, is no longer Hamas strategy in the field.

Hamas has also failed to provide for the welfare of Gaza inhabitants. In the summer of 2014, Hamas agreed to participate in a unity government headed by President Abbas’s Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah even though Hamas was excluded from the government’s ministerial portfolios. This was the first indication since its takeover of Gaza in 2007 that Hamas recognizes its failure as a government.

The Gaza public, of course, realized Hamas’s failure much sooner. Years earlier, the Hamas government failed to solve Gaza’s pressing electrical blackouts, which created sewage and other ecological problems connected to the need for continuous electrical supply. A movement touted for having provided welfare services in the past is now devoting less than 2% of its expenditures, by its own account, to health and welfare. It has imposed additional taxes on top of the 14% value added tax Israel collects on imports and then transfers, according to an international agreement, to the rival PA. The concrete purchased with this income has gone into building offensive tunnels into Israel rather than solving Gaza’s critical housing problem. On top of all this, Hamas is unable to pay its civil servants their full salaries on a regular basis.

Since 2014, the inhabitants of Gaza have cast their vote against Hamas. They do not do this at the ballot box. (Neither the PA nor Hamas seeks to continue the democratic process that led to the 2007 civil war, which continues to this day.) Instead, they vote with their feet. When Hamas tries to bring them out to rallies, they stay home.

This can be clearly seen in photos of rallies commemorating the creation of Hamas. I found one photo, for example, that had been taken in 2009 in Gaza's largest square. It is a long shot capturing tens of thousands of demonstrators. A photo taken at the Hamas commemoration ceremony in 2016, however – two years after the punishing bout in the summer of 2014 – looks very different. Hamas had moved the festivities to a narrow street, and the photo was taken close up and at street level. Instead of tens of thousands, one can hardly count one-tenth of that.

This development can be easily corroborated with "Google trends." A search of the word "Hamas", written in Arabic, on Palestinian sites shows a decline in the use of the term over the years. The findings are even more dramatic in Arabic searches for "Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades", the fighting arm of the Hamas movement.

Little wonder, then, that Hamas has come up with a document that agrees, at least on tactical grounds, to a Palestinian state in Gaza and Judea and Samaria/the West Bank. The group is attempting to assuage Abbas and the Arab states that back him. Pressure from Gaza's inhabitants is probably one reason for this move. Given Hamas's failure as both a government and a terrorist movement, there will likely be more popular pressure to come, with further concessions down the line.

Israel must be patient. Time is on its side.

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