



## The User's Manual of Hamas

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The problem is not that Hamas will not recognize Israel. The problem is that Hamas cannot recognize Israel. Hamas is a terrorist group that has become a political party. More significantly, however, it is a religious organization and part of a global movement.

That movement goes by various names: Militant Islamism, Islamic Fascism, Radical Jihadism and Salifism among them. Rivals for the movement's leadership include Osama bin Laden and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

A distinguished and moderate Muslim religious scholar with whom I spoke recently observed that in Islam it is not only people and communities that have rights. God has rights too. For Hamas, it is an article of faith -- in the most literal sense -- that any lands conquered by Islamic warriors belong to Allah. If those

lands are then taken (or re-taken) by infidels, it is the duty of Muslims to wage jihad, holy war, to win them back.

One can perform this religious duty or one can fail to perform it. What one cannot do, in the view of Hamas, is violate His rights. As Hamas' charter clearly states: "[T]he land of Palestine has been an Islamic Waqf [endowment] throughout the generations and until the Day of Resurrection, no one can renounce it or part of it, or abandon it or part of it." For this reason, Hamas "strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."

This does not imply that Hamas must begin to wage all-out war against Israel immediately. Hamas' leaders may be willing, even eager, to maintain a hudna, a period of quiet, with Israel. It is no sin -- religiously or strategically -- to fight later

if that means you'll be more likely to win, rather than sooner if that means you'll be more likely to lose. To understand this is to see why it is unrealistic for diplomats to demand that Hamas recognize Israel and renounce violence. What is possible is to persuade Hamas to forego and suppress violence – out of self-interest.

Hamas' leaders need to be led to the conclusion that – for now – Israel is too strong to challenge. It must be clearly communicated to them that they will be held personally responsible for every attack that originates from territory they control, even if it can be plausibly claimed that another terrorist group – e.g. Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades – has fired the rocket or dispatched the suicide bomber.

Israel should not be restrained from responding forcefully to any and all provocations – so forcefully that even the most hard-line Hamas leaders will have to acknowledge that violence is proving counter-productive. Hamas should receive no assistance of any kind from the international community unless it demonstrates that it can and will rein in the killers.

In other words, once Hamas holds authority, it must be made to accept responsibility; the more so since Hamas has not imposed itself on Palestinians but has been chosen by them.

It is naïve for Americans, Europeans and Israelis to believe they can make Hamas leaders change their deeply

held religious beliefs. But calculations of self-interest will affect their behavior. Now is not the time to attempt to hammer out a peace treaty or final deal on the borders between Israel and a Palestinian state. What can be achieved is what Henry Kissinger has called “a long-term interim understanding.”

According to polls taken since Hamas won the elections, two-thirds of Palestinians do not agree with Hamas' religiously based rejection of Israel's right to exist. Most Palestinians still favor a two-state solution, especially if the alternative is indefinite strife and deprivation.

Might Hamas behave like a normal political party and change its positions to better align with voter sentiment? That's highly improbable. Could Hamas persuade most Palestinians to adopt its faith-based view of peace with Israel as an unforgivable apostasy? Yes, of course, but that will be less likely if terrorism is consistently punished, not rewarded, and if Palestinians come to see that it is anti-Israeli hatred and intransigence that is preventing them from improving their lives and the lives of their children.

Should they grasp that, Palestinians will elect different leaders: politicians who can make compromises rather than religious extremists who can not.

To govern is to choose. An international community that respects Palestinians will allow them to choose – and to accept responsibility for their choices. It will not treat them

like infants, attempting to protect them from the consequences of their decisions (including their decision to elect Hamas). It also will guaran-

tee that when Palestinians are ready to make different choices, they have the freedom to do so.

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