Middle East Brief

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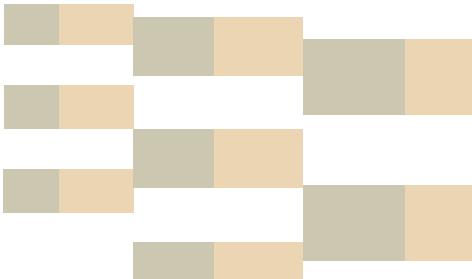
Many Roads to Palestine?
The Potential and Peril of Multiple Strategies Within a Divided Palestinian National Movement

Dr. Peter Krause

A scene from the Palestinian prisoner swap for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit embodies the greatest political challenge facing the Palestinian national movement today: internal division in both organization and strategy. On October 18, 2011, at the Muqata in Ramallah—the compound of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas— civilians from across the region gathered to greet the roughly one hundred Palestinian prisoners released to the West Bank from Israeli captivity. On its surface, the welcome ceremony appeared to be a symbol of national unity, as both Abbas and senior Hamas official Hassan Yousef delivered speeches. Furthermore, both Hamas and Fatah flags were confiscated at the entrance to the Muqata, and officials handed out two other national flags to be waved at the ceremony: the red, green, white, and black Palestinian flag, and a flag promoting Palestine as the 194th state of the United Nations. Unfortunately for the Palestinians, rather than masking the significant divisions within the national movement, this thin veneer of unity only highlighted them.

The very flag passed out as a 'unifying' alternative to the green and yellow party banners (the Palestine-UN flag) represented the strategy of international

negotiations and engagement, which is led by a single faction (Fatah) and is currently competing with alternative strategies of armed struggle and popular resistance—as well as their affiliated organizations—to lead the Palestinian national movement. Ironically, it was the kidnapping of Shalit by Hamas amidst its armed struggle that gave Palestinians the bargaining chip for the release of prisoners, while popular uprisings in the region drove the timing of the deal. Unfortunately for the Palestinians, none of these strategies has yielded a Palestinian state or significant steps towards it of late, and the internal division has sparked infighting, recriminations, and a lack of cohesive effort. The common solution to these competing organizations and strategies, suggested by Palestinian policymakers, civilians, and external observers alike, is reconciliation between Palestinian factions to create a newly united movement with a single strategy.

This Brief will argue that it is not self-evident that organizational and strategic unity is the most favorable arrangement for the Palestinians in theory, however, nor the most realistic in practice. Many observers compare the strategic effectiveness of negotiations, armed struggle, and popular resistance without accounting for the fact that the key Palestinian actors who implement such strategies are self-interested organizations who care as much about the impact these strategies have on their own power as on the larger national movement.[1] Attempts at unity among roughly equal factions like Fatah and Hamas are therefore unlikely to succeed because of these competing organizational concerns.[2] History suggests that the most auspicious development for the Palestinians would be the triumph of one faction within the movement, which would allow a hegemon to impose strategic coherence, clarity in signaling, and credibility in threats and assurances delivered to Palestinian adversaries and allies alike. Given that no one group is likely to dominate the movement in the short term, however, this Brief argues that multiple strategies amidst division are not necessarily destined for failure. Armed struggle is often a counterproductive strategy when carried out amidst internal division, but negotiations and popular resistance are potentially complementary strategies that could yield gains for the Palestinians despite a lack of movement unity.[3]

Why 'Unity' Will Fail

Palestinians recognize the challenges posed by their division better than any observer, and, ironically, they are perhaps most united in their call for unity. As Fatah and Palestinian Authority (PA) Minister Saeb Erekat told his Negotiations Support Unit in 2009: "Palestinians are speaking with 2,000 voices just when we need to be speaking with one."[4] Sami Abu Zhuri, a Hamas spokesman in Gaza, noted, "The current circumstances that surround us urge all of us to regain the national unity."[5] On March 15, 2011, grassroots organizations in the West Bank and Gaza launched popular demonstrations to demand movement unity, a goal that the vast majority of Palestinians support.[6] It is understandable that so many look to unity because theoretically such a grand alliance could potentially end counterproductive infighting, give the movement a single strategy without the current contradictions, and provide Palestinians with a unitary, strong face to deal with Israel, the United States, and the rest of international community. Despite so many calling for Palestinian unity, however, the current structure of the movement and the realities of organizational self-interest make such an endeavor unlikely to succeed.

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Although Fatah and Hamas both care deeply about achieving a Palestinian state in some form, they also prioritize their own group's survival and strength.[7] As one organizer of the March 15 demonstrations noted, "Hamas disappointed us. For them, they have God first, then their movement, their movement, their movement. Then Palestine."[8] These organizational goals conflict with attempts at unity, especially when multiple strong factions seek movement leadership.

Groups sincerely want unity, but on their own terms. Hamas sought unity by attempting to join the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1990, only three years after its inception. However, Hamas's demand of 40-50% of the seats in the Palestinian National Council (PNC) would have given the group a degree of control that Fatah would not grant.[9] Of course, Fatah was happy to unify the movement with Hamas joining the PLO as its subordinate with a small minority of the PNC seats, but such an arrangement was unacceptable to Hamas, who believed it should be the leader by right and by strength on the ground.[10] Hamas may be a bit stronger today than it was then, but otherwise the basics of the internal structure are the same as twenty years ago: two strong factions, each of which believes it should be leading the movement. Each is happy to unify if that unity cements its predominance, but is otherwise hesitant to risk significant organizational autonomy and strength for uncertain strategic gains with unknown ramifications.

This is the tragedy for divided social movements with multiple strong factions: even though all groups understand that unity can help them achieve strategic success, their very desire to exist and maximize their own strength often prevents them from 'colluding to win.' In addition to the failed Fatah-Hamas negotiations in 1990, the contradictions inherent in organizational and strategic objectives prevented unity between the PLO and Fatah in 1965 and between Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1968.[11] Even with the 'successful' attempt at unity in 1974, when all Palestinian factions agreed to the Ten Point Plan, the PFLP and a number of other groups subsequently withdrew just before the PLO received recognition from the Arab League and the United Nations. In more recent times, organizational self-interest has even ruined signed deals reached with the help of external actors, such as the Cairo Agreement of 2005 (backed by Egypt) and the Mecca Accords of 2007 (backed by Saudi Arabia). In each case, both sides wanted unity in theory, but only if it gave them organizational leadership in practice.

Furthermore, unity is difficult to execute in practice when the key parties disagree on the ultimate strategic objective. Although Fatah and Hamas both desire a Palestinian state, they currently have different visions for what that state will look like. Putting aside social and religious issues, the two parties currently differ over the envisioned borders of the future state. Fatah has made costly signals that it is willing to accept a state roughly within the 1967 borders. On the other hand, Hamas has demonstrated its willingness to control any territory 'liberated' from Israel, but has not made reliable claims that it will ultimately recognize Israel or accept the 1967 borders as anything more than a stepping-stone to additional territory. Whether the strategy is armed struggle, negotiations, or both, the Palestinians have to provide both threats and assurances to the Israelis to succeed, and those assurances of 'this, but no more' cannot be credibly made if the two groups do not agree on the end goal.[12]

What does this mean for the present deal agreed to by Hamas and Fatah? First and foremost, it means that it is a bit of a misnomer to call it a 'unity' deal. Fatah and Hamas have not agreed to unite their key institutions under a single command and control, including their security and military forces. This ensures the continuation of a largely anarchical Palestinian national movement with multiple armed forces, not a monopoly of force by any single actor. Furthermore, the deal itself does not create a long-term national unity government, but rather lays the groundwork for an interim, caretaker government of 'independents,' which will supposedly rule until the holding of elections at some undetermined time for a new government.

Unfortunately for the Palestinians, even this relatively shallow deal is unlikely to deliver on its limited promise. It is far from certain that elections will even be held in the first place. Ironically, one condition needed for elections to occur is similar to what is necessary for a war to break out: both sides have to think they can win. If either Fatah or Hamas finds itself losing popular support and likely to lose the election in the coming months, the weakened group will likely look for ways to pull out of the deal, delegitimize the elections, and/or take diversionary action with Israel to make elections impossible.[13] The individuals who signed the deal, Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, themselves lead non-unitary groups whose subdivisions have different interests that may subvert any attempt at unity. Hamas leaders in Gaza have offered public resistance to the deal signed by its external leadership, forcing a postponement of the negotiations. On the other hand, Abbas has acted at times as a national leader seeking to reach a deal before he retires from politics. This potentially places his interests at odds with Fatah's 'Young Guard' who may ultimately balk at a unity deal that once again threatens their chance to finally lead Fatah and the Palestinians.

If elections are ultimately held, there is no guarantee that the results will be respected. The loser would have a strong incentive to ignore the results and a number of potential advantages in doing so. External actors are often required to provide incentives to honor election results amidst instability, but Palestinians currently experience the opposite situation. The Israelis and Americans are strongly set against a Hamas victory or takeover of the West Bank.[14] Therefore, should Hamas win, there is little to suggest that the group would be able to gain control of the West Bank against Fatah, Israeli, and American resistance, yielding a potential repeat of 2006. One might suggest that these are really elections to see if Hamas can hold onto power in Gaza, as a Hamas takeover of the West Bank from Gaza will likely not be allowed to happen. Given the significant potential costs and small potential benefits of such an election for Hamas, it is not surprising that the group has been more hesitant than Fatah to move towards elections in the past few years. On the other hand, although Fatah may have Israeli and American backing to retake control of Gaza if it triumphed in the elections, the geographical division and Hamas's strong security apparatus in Gaza would make it difficult to unseat the group from power there.

These realities lead to the conclusion that elections may not be held, likely will not be fully respected if they are, and under almost no circumstances will lead to a truly unified Palestinian national movement. Even if elections are held and respected, they are likely to lead to a split outcome, which, absent institutional union of the security and economic sectors, will put the movement largely right back where it started. For unity to occur, there must be no preferable way for groups to achieve their organizational goals—currently Fatah can turn to the U.S. and international community while Hamas looks to Egypt and the opening of the Rafah crossing. There also needs to be strong external forces pushing for unity, rather than against it as is currently the case.[15] This leaves two possible outcomes for the Palestinian national movement whether there are elections or not: hegemony and division.

Internal Hegemony: Promising in Theory, Unlikely in the Short Term

Although hegemony does not get nearly as much attention as either unity or division, the internal victory of one Palestinian faction offers the greatest potential for achieving strategic goals, even though it is not without its drawbacks. Nothing will make organizations disregard their own well-being. When one group dominates its social movement, however, it can often best achieve its organizational ends by pursuing collective, strategic goals that also benefit the entire movement. The unrivalled power of a hegemonic group ensures that the selective benefits of position and status that are connected to the creation of a state will accrue to its members, rather than those of its rivals. Furthermore, the presence of a leviathan within the movement imposes strategic coherence, clarity in signaling, and credibility in threats and assurances crafted to achieve a common objective. Finally, the disparity in strength between groups means that attempts by weaker factions at infighting or spoiling are likely to be small in number, short in duration, and unsuccessful in execution.[16]

Hegemonic social movements have found success in Algeria, where the National Liberation Front (FLN) and its brutal repression of internal dissent achieved independence from France after multiple squabbling nationalist groups had failed for decades. Hegemony also succeeded in the Palestinian Mandate, where the Labor-dominated Zionist movement successfully utilized good cop/bad cop dynamics alongside the weaker and more militant Revisionists to coerce British withdrawal while still winning international support for the state of Israel. Indeed, the greatest strategic successes of the Palestinian national movement occurred in the late 1980s, when Fatah dominated the movement in a way no group has before or since.[17] The benefits of a hegemonic social movement in structural incentives, cohesion, and credibility are such that each of these successful campaigns was dominated by a different strategy: international engagement and negotiations (Labor Zionists), armed struggle (FLN), and popular resistance (Fatah).

Although a hegemonic social movement may have the greatest potential for strategic success, it poses significant challenges in the course of its creation, function, and aftermath. First, the process of achieving and maintaining hegemony for one group can get messy, as no rival is likely to go down without a fight. The FLN employed vicious violence against potential competitors, killing many more Algerians than French. Although the Labor Zionists ultimately triumphed, their infighting with the Revisionists brought the movement to the brink of civil war. Second, although a hegemonic movement may enable a dominant group to enrich itself via the achievement of statehood, it also incentivizes the leading group to engage in corruption due to the lack of a viable rival to replace it. A movement dominated by one group may lose the democracy of ideas that spurs innovative tactics and energetic attempts to continually earn the loyalty of the base. Indeed, although the Palestinian national movement made strategic gains when Fatah was at the peak of its power in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the group also faced significant charges of corruption and passivity once it felt unchallenged within the Palestinian Authority.[18]

In any case, hegemony is unlikely to emerge for the Palestinians in the short term given the geographical divide and relatively equal strength of Fatah and Hamas. Short of either Hamas agreeing to elections in which it is trounced, followed by a successful struggle to wrest back control of Gaza by Fatah, or Israel and the U.S. totally pulling support for the PA, leaving Fatah vulnerable, the movement is likely to remain divided among roughly equal rivals in the short term. Not all division is the same, however. This final type of movement structure can lead to either success or failure depending on the strategic choices made by key groups.

The Potential and Peril of Division: Counterproductive and Complementary Strategies

The structure of the Palestinian national movement may ultimately hold the key to its success or failure, but with unity and hegemony unlikely in the near term, division is the current reality. None of the three strategies—negotiations, armed struggle, or popular resistance—can succeed alone in a divided movement. Each strategy individually mobilizes too small a subset of the population, lacks sufficient strength and credibility, and ignores or contradicts communication with key audiences.[19] Contrary to the conventional wisdom, however, division does not doom the Palestinians to failure. Although armed struggle is likely to be strategically ineffective within a divided movement, negotiations and popular resistance can complement each other to generate strategic progress despite an initial lack of movement unity or hegemony.

Armed struggle can be strategically effective in a hegemonic movement, as the single dominant group can impose coherent tactics, clarity in signaling, and credibility in threats and assurances to a target audience. In a competitive context where the movement is internally divided, however, such as in the 1960s and 1970s or during the Second Intifada, armed struggle is often strategically ineffective, if not counterproductive.[20] In these periods of internal division, spirals can develop where multiple groups launch attacks in larger and larger numbers and/or against more and more extreme targets in order to demonstrate their superior commitment to the cause and gain domestic support. This violent, competitive outbidding can generate excessive attacks against military or civilian targets, however, which generate unwanted retaliation and popular backlash. Furthermore, the inability of any one group to control the use of violence hinders attempts at negotiation by weakening Palestinian credibility and blurring the boundaries of Palestinian demands and assurances. It also weakens popular support

among key Israeli and international audiences that are engaged by negotiations and popular resistance.

On the other hand, armed struggle often leads to shifts in the internal movement hierarchy, which represent organizational successes or failures. Groups often allow the impact of violence on their own position of power to color their perception of the success or failure of armed struggle in general. Hamas, the driver of armed struggle after Oslo and the biggest beneficiary of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, presents the strategy as a major success. The Second Intifada helped to spoil negotiations from which Hamas was excluded in 1999-2000, and led to a rise in Hamas's organizational strength relative to its rival Fatah, culminating in its 2006 electoral victory. Leaders of Fatah and those of popular resistance experienced the destruction of Palestinian Authority institutions, increased Israeli presence in the West Bank, and the loss of international support, however, and so Abbas, former Fatah leader Mahmoud Dahlan, and Palestinian National Initiative (PNI) leader Mustafa Barghouti perceive the militarization of the Second Intifada as a disaster for the movement.[21] Ironically, the use of armed struggle to outbid stronger rivals for support was not unknown to Fatah, who had successfully used violence to establish its revolutionary credentials and wrest the leadership of the national movement from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) in the 1960s. These campaigns of violence also failed to yield strategic gains for the Palestinians, however, again demonstrating the shortcomings of armed struggle amidst division.[22] Regardless of its strategic value, however, armed struggle will remain an attractive option for non-state groups as long as it promises organizational gains.

Although each possesses its own strengths and weaknesses, negotiations and popular resistance are potentially strong complements, both strategically and organizationally. First and foremost, negotiations and popular resistance can potentially engage all key audiences without alienating them, in contrast to what is often the case with armed struggle. In fact, nonviolent national struggles often gain significant international support, especially if they remain so in the face of state repression. On the other hand, negotiations do not drive away the Palestinian audience (especially if they deliver results), while Fatah and the PLO and PA it controls give the movement a known face with existing status to engage with international elites.[23]

Second, negotiations in a vacuum provide the Palestinians with little leverage at the bargaining table, as Fatah will not be able to extract significant concessions from

the Israelis nor provide assurances to them without broad support and some form of coercive lever. Popular resistance has the potential to actively involve the largest number of Palestinians and international backers while simultaneously exerting pressure on the Israelis and building support for a deal among their ranks. In this way, popular resistance can gain domestic support and provide leverage for negotiations without losing international legitimacy.[24]

Just as popular resistance provides the mass engagement and coercive leverage needed for successful negotiations, so does Fatah's organizational strength hold a key to exploiting the full potential of popular resistance. To this point, the greatest weakness of popular resistance for the Palestinians is its lack of cohesive organization. There are certainly many local popular resistance groups in the West Bank villages of Bil'in, Nil'in, and Nabi Saleh, as well as nascent national and international organizations in the form of the Palestinian National Initiative (PNI) and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Movement (BDS). However, these groups are weakly connected, differ in their utilization of international law, boycotts, and community level demonstrations, and lack the membership, funding, and status of major organizations like Fatah and the PLO. If Fatah instead threw its political, organizational, and financial weight behind popular resistance (instead of repressing it), the potential for massive, effective campaigns increases significantly.[25] The First Intifada provides a relevant example, as mass mobilization and popular resistance backed and channeled by Fatah created a perfect storm of coercion, engagement, and cohesive effort that yielded strategic gains for the Palestinians.[26]

Furthermore, the fact that popular resistance is currently carried out by smaller, scattered groups is actually a potential positive for a partnership with Fatah. Unlike the proposed Fatah-Hamas unity deal, there are not two powerful, roughly equal organizations that duplicate much of the other and could both attain movement leadership in the short term. Alliances are more likely to endure when groups are unequal in size, strength, and specialization, because a division of labor comes more easily and the popular resistance groups have fewer entrenched organizational concerns to defend. To the extent that there is a promising 'unity' deal for the Palestinians to pursue, therefore, it may not be between Fatah and Hamas, but rather between Fatah and popular resistance organizations.

Nonetheless, the success of a de facto alliance between the organizations and strategies of negotiations and popular resistance is far from guaranteed. Three significant obstacles can spoil Palestinian efforts at any point in the process. First, although utilizing popular resistance may hold great strategic promise for the Palestinians collectively, it is not without significant risks for organizations like Fatah and Hamas. Mass demonstrations composed largely of non-party members can potentially turn into protests against the PA, Fatah, and Hamas and not just against Israel.[27] Popular resistance creates political and economic instability by its very nature, which can weaken Fatah's hold on the West Bank and hurt many of its supporters who have benefitted from increased stability in the region. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that mass demonstrations will remain nonviolent, as the inevitable use of stones, tear gas, and rubber bullets can quickly escalate to live fire by one or both sides and potentially generate Second Intifada-type spirals of conflict. Finally, Fatah is wary of losing the aid and status it receives from the Americans and Israelis, who warn against utilizing popular resistance and continue to push for an exclusive Palestinian reliance on negotiations. These concerns explain why Fatah has not encouraged mass demonstrations of late in favor of its UN bid: it does not want to lose the control and audiences that it currently has. Faltering negotiations and internal tensions between the Old and Young Guard of Fatah may push the group towards such fresh tactics, but the risk to Fatah's organizational control may continue to thwart any moves towards mass campaigns of popular resistance. On the other side of a potential alliance, many popular resistance leaders hesitate to work with Fatah and the PA because they perceive them as corrupt and too strongly tied to Israel and the United States.

Second, where does Hamas fit into this story? Despite recent rhetoric in support of popular resistance by some members of the Hamas leadership, an alliance between Hamas and popular resistance groups would not currently be a harmonious one. Hamas's status, support of armed struggle, and at times forceful Islamization of the Gaza Strip sidelines at best and alienates at worst the very audiences popular resistance aims to engage. Hamas's current statements that it aims to support popular resistance without altering any of its positions concerning armed struggle and recognition of Israel demonstrate that it has not yet come to grips with the impossibility of having its cake and eating it too with multiple audiences. Furthermore, its significant repression of popular resistance in Gaza to this point due to its concerns over control casts doubt that its leadership will be willing and able to do a turnabout on this issue.[28] The political and geographical division between Hamas and Fatah creates some incentives for competitive governance, which can lead to the two groups contending to provide the most stable, effective regime to gain strength and legitimacy from potential Palestinian supporters.[29] However, the lack of regular elections and restraints on state-building without Israel's acquiescence means that the benefits of

such competition for Palestinian civilians are likely to remain slight.[30] Furthermore, as long as Hamas remains a strong actor in the movement, it retains considerable ability to spoil initiatives it does not support.

Finally, like Fatah and Hamas, the supporters of negotiations and popular resistance face tensions over the shape of a future Palestinian state. This debate has existed within the Palestinian national movement since its inception, and it is unlikely to end even after a state is founded. Nonetheless, the issue of a one or two-state solution with Israel is a central one that divides many. Although a growing number of popular resistance supporters back a one-state solution, Fatah and the PA continue to push for a two-state solution, in part because it will maintain their predominance, whereas a one-state solution would initially absorb them as citizens within Israel and diminish their organizational standing.[31]

This division is potentially as much of a boon to the Palestinians as a burden, however. The growing presence of Palestinians supporting a one-state solution, coupled with unfavorable demographic trends for the Israelis and the Zionist goals of a Jewish, democratic state may be the strongest card there is to convince the Israelis to agree to a tenable two-state solution.[32] Ironically, a push for Palestinian civil rights and a one-state solution could therefore serve as a key factor in securing a two-state reality. The potential good cop/bad cop dynamic can only be effective, however, if the two-state solution remains a viable possibility and if the one-staters remain in the minority. If they become the strong majority, Israelis will have less incentive to agree to the presence of a Palestinian state whose borders they believe will not be credibly maintained.[33]

Conclusion: Cui Bono?

Although the majority of Palestinian policymakers, civilians, and external observers publically extol the virtues of movement unity, this Brief's analysis demonstrates the difficulty of achieving true unity and why it may not generate greater collective benefits for Palestinians than alternative movement structures and strategies.

Many other factors will play a part in the success and failure of the Palestinian national movement, such as whether the Israelis are willing to accept a deal roughly in line with the Clinton Parameters and the Arab Peace Initiative, and whether the U.S. and leading Arab states are willing to help spend significant political capital to make it happen. For Palestinians, however, the structure of their national movement and the interaction of their strategic choices will continue to play the largest role in campaign

results. For those trying to analyze these campaigns, asking *cui bono?* and conducting clear-eyed analysis of the major actors and their interests can help to generate the most realistic assessment of likely actions, roadblocks, opportunities, and outcomes.

Endnotes

1   For further analysis of the dual motives of groups within social movements and their effectiveness in employing violent and nonviolent strategies to achieve each type of objective, see Peter Krause, "The Political Effectiveness of Non-State Violence: Terrorism, Insurgency, and the Pursuit of Power," (PhD diss.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011).

2   It is important to note that this paper addresses the political effectiveness of armed struggle, negotiations, and popular resistance, not their normative value or legitimacy. Although I note how the feelings of key Palestinian, Israeli, and international audiences towards the legitimacy of each tactic may affect its efficacy, this paper does not focus on the legitimacy of the use of force by Palestinians or Israelis. Indeed, Palestinian groups themselves make this distinction, e.g. Fatah leaders claim that the Palestinians have the legitimate right to use force against the Israelis given the occupation, but they believe that in the current situation violence is ineffective and should be avoided.

3   Popular resistance involves the use of demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and sanctions by Palestinians and their supporters against Israel and its policies. Such activities follow a similar strategic logic to armed struggle, in that they raise the economic, political, and social costs of Israeli policies in order to exert pressure to change them, but without the use of lethal violence. Additionally, popular resistance aims to delegitimize Israeli policies, especially in the West Bank and Gaza, in order to build international support for the Palestinian cause.

4   "Meeting Minutes: Dr. Saeb Erakat Meeting with the Negotiations Support Unit," (Ramallah: June 2, 2009).

5   DPA, "Hamas Announces Initiative to Regain National Unity with Fatah," *Haaretz* (March 5, 2011).*

6   Polls demonstrate that the Palestinian people rate the lack of national unity as tied for the top problem facing Palestinians today, alongside 'poverty' and 'the occupation'. See Khalil Shikaki, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 41," (Ramallah: Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, September 2011).

7   In fact, organizational concerns do a better job explaining actions surrounding the Shalit deal than do strategic ones: Abbas's decision to turn to the United Nations in the first place was driven by the massive campaigns of popular resistance across the Arab world, which threatened to further destabilize his party's hold on power. Concerned with Abbas' rising popularity in light of his U.N. bid as well as their own standing amidst revolutions in Egypt, Syria, and beyond, Hamas finally played the card it had held for over five years, trading Shalit for over 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in an effort to boost its flagging support across the Palestinian spectrum and position itself for improved relations with neighboring regimes.

8   Karl Vick, "On the Run, the Palestinian Youth Movement

May yet Get Its Way," *Time* (March 27, 2011).*

9   See Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 650-653.

10 Ironically, PNC seats were always supposed to be elected by the Palestinian people, but that has never happened in practice due in large part to the interests of Palestinian organizations and foreign states that prefer to exert control over the distribution of power. As part of the current unity deal, a special committee established to address PLO reforms voted for direct elections of the PNC. If history is any guide, however, leading factions will work to prevent such elections or will continue to sideline to the PNC politically.

11 In a role reversal from the later Fatah-Hamas dispute over PLO seats, it was then outsider Fatah who demanded 66% of the seats on the executive committee of the PLO to join the organization in 1965, but the PLO leadership refused. See Ehud Yaari, *Strike Terror: The Story of Fatah* (New York: Sabra Books, 1970), pp. 70-73, Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*, pp. 100-101. On the negotiations between the PFLP, Fatah, and the PLO in 1968, see Ibid., pp. 219-221.

12 It is worth noting that Hamas today is where Fatah was in 1974: they will accept control of the West Bank and/or Gaza, but not as the final solution of the conflict. There is debate in Israel and abroad whether Hamas will continue to follow Fatah's trajectory or whether its religious foundations make it unlikely to concede territory to Israel.

13 The fact that both Fatah and Hamas currently believe that they are the leading group means that mutual overconfidence may not be unattainable. Nonetheless, the challenge of getting roughly equal rivals to agree to an endeavor that will likely weaken one of them—but that requires the voluntary participation of both—is formidable.

14 This could change if Hamas agreed to recognize Israel, renounce terrorism, or respect previous agreements signed by the PLO. However, the current 'unity' deal has no such provisions as of yet. The interim 'unity' government of technocrats is designed to address this issue in part, as Western donors may not pull funds from a government in which Hamas does not have direct representation. Any newly elected government will contain significant Hamas representation, however, leaving the Palestinians right back where they started on this issue.

15   Depending on the aftermath of Egypt's elections, the situation could change. A stable, stronger Egypt pushing for unity could help change the game to a degree, but none of those conditions (stability, strength, or willingness to sacrifice to pursue Palestinian unity) are guaranteed. Furthermore, an Islamist-dominated Egyptian government that supports Hamas and gives them control of the Rafah crossing could actually have the opposite effect, as Hamas would then have less need for unity with Fatah. Qatar's recent hosting of Palestinian unity talks in February 2012 demonstrate that it may be ready to play a more muscular role in providing financial and diplomatic backing for unity. It is unclear if the Qataris can help the Palestinians overcome the hurdles that the Egyptians and Saudis could not, however.

16 It is important to note that in a hegemonic movement, as in a divided movement, alliances among all of the factions are lacking. However, the presence of a group with unrivalled strength in a hegemonic movement allows for cohesive action.

17 In the 1980s, Fatah did not unify with Fatah-Intifada or the PFLP amidst the height of their rivalries, it defeated them militarily and politically and became the undisputed leader that directed the national movement.

18 The Oslo Accords yielded strategic gains for the Palestinians, including territorial control, international recognition, foreign aid, and the establishment of proto-state institutions. The benefits of Oslo accrued disproportionately to Fatah and its allies, however. Hamas was not involved in the negotiations, which themselves wrested control from the ongoing Madrid process that partially sidelined Fatah and would likely have had a different organizational outcome, if not a different strategic one. Haidar Abdel-Shafi, the head of the Palestinian negotiating team at Madrid that was composed largely of unaffiliated Palestinian leaders, claimed in regard to a question concerning Fatah's actions, "This is a question you should pose to Chairman Arafat... surely there was no *national* gain." Ironically, Abdel-Shafi would later help found the Palestinian National Initiative (PNI), which is a 'third force' alternative to Fatah and Hamas that backs popular resistance. Nigel Parsons, *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority: From Oslo to Al-Aqsa* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 80. Not surprisingly, Fatah and many of its supporters view Oslo and its subsequent two decades of negotiations as positive, if not ideal, while Fatah's rivals often point to the Oslo Accords and subsequent 'peace process' as the greatest failure of the negotiation strategy. These critics claim that each agreement failed to achieve a state while dulling Palestinian resistance, granting Israel greater legitimacy, and allowing Israel to subcontract much of its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to the weak Palestinian Authority (PA).

19 The most recent accomplishments of each strategy reflect this reality, as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) granting of membership to Palestine, the Shalit prisoner release, and the slight rerouting of the West Bank barrier around Bil'in are at best tactical gains for international engagement and negotiations, armed struggle, and popular resistance, respectively.

20 Armed struggle amidst division in the 1960s and 1970s may have shifted the internal hierarchy of the Palestinian national movement to certain groups' benefit, but it led to two military disasters for the Palestinians: the Six Day War with Israel and Black September in Jordan.

21 Abbas has been consistent and strident in his condemnation of the militarization of the Second Intifada and made it a central part of his political platform. On Dahlan and Barghouti, see Ghassan Sharbil, "Controversial Fatah Player Opens His Books to 'Al-Hayat' and Opens Fire," *Al-Hayat*, September 3, 2008, Eric Hazan, "Mustafa Barghouthi: Palestinian Defiance," *New Left Review* 32 (2005). Not all Fatah leaders believe that the militarization of the Second Intifada was a mistake, and some argued at the 2009 Fatah conference for a return to armed struggle.

22 Later gains made by the PLO in the form of recognition by the Arab League and the United Nations in 1974 were not achieved until after the movement had unified.

23 Negotiations involve engagement with Israel as well as the United States, the Arab League, the European Union, and the United Nations to varying degrees. The strategic logic is that through diplomatic give and take over the central issues

in dispute—borders, refugees, security, settlements, and Jerusalem—Palestinians can achieve a sovereign state that is recognized by Israel and the rest of the international community.

24 There are those who claim that popular resistance cannot work and/or is a weak tactic, but the Israelis themselves do not seem to agree. The Knesset recently passed anti-boycott legislation, and Israeli leaders have recently cited BDS and 'lawfare' as some of the greatest challenges facing Israel. For an excellent work on the effectiveness of popular resistance, see Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

25 Popular resistance has been a staple of the Palestinian national movement since its inception, although it has not been a dominant tactic of the strongest Palestinian actors of late. For an excellent analysis of the history of popular resistance within the Palestinian national movement, also referred to as 'civil resistance' or 'nonviolent resistance,' see Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

26 The chronology would be similar today, as Fatah did not initiate the uprising in 1987 and was indeed surprised by it. Nonetheless, by early 1988 Fatah had taken control and provided direction for the vast majority of the campaign, helping to grow and channel it significantly. Moves like PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and Abbas supporting a boycott of Israeli settlement goods with the Karameh fund are small examples of the potential of such an alliance, but are a pittance compared to what full cooperation would entail. The alliance between Abbas and Fayyad is evidence of the potential for a larger union. Fayyad is not a Fatah member, yet he has worked alongside Abbas while demonstrating some support for popular resistance and denouncing armed struggle and negotiations in isolation.

27 Polling data suggests that Hamas and Fatah should be concerned about protests potentially turning against them. Sizable populations in both the West Bank and Gaza support regime change, including a strong majority of the youth that would be on the front lines of popular resistance. Khalil Shikaki, *Coping with the Arab Spring: Palestinian Domestic and Regional Ramifications*, vol. 58, Middle East Brief (Waltham, MA: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, December 2011), pp. 4-5.

28 Many Hamas leaders do not support Khaled Meshaal's stated desire for the group to shift to popular resistance. Hamas's recent repression of smaller armed groups in Gaza demonstrates that it recognizes the utility of restraint and credibility, but its leadership does not yet seem to agree with Abbas that armed struggle, while legitimate, is counterproductive. As long as Fatah and Hamas continue to vie for leadership, Hamas will have incentives to return to armed struggle to renew its revolutionary credentials, put pressure on the Israelis and/or Fatah, or spoil a deal of which it disapproves.

29 Hamas has constructed its own governing institutions in Gaza, while Salam Fayyad's attempt to build state institutions in the West Bank was the most prominent strategy before the Arab Spring. On Hamas's construction of security services in Gaza, see Yezid Sayigh, *"We Serve the People": Hamas Policing in Gaza*, ed. Naghmeh Sohrabi, Crown Paper Series (Waltham, MA: Crown Center for Middle East Studies, 2011).

30 Furthermore, a key problem of competitive governance is that parallel Palestinian institutions in the West Bank and Gaza can become harder to reconcile, especially as time passes and individuals develop entrenched interests to maintain them as is.

31 Polls demonstrate that the majority of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza desire a two-state solution, not a one-state solution. Shikaki, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 41." Hamas's stated goal of a one-state solution is premised on the idea that Hamas would lead the new state, not Fatah and certainly not a Jewish organization. Nonetheless, Khaled Meshaal himself recently noted, "We have political differences, but the common ground is the state on the '67 borders. Why don't we work in this common area." ["Hamas Leader: New Focus on Popular Anti-Israel Protests," *YNet* (December 23, 2011).](#)*

32 A growing number of Israelis recognize this challenge. In some ways, the relatively new Israeli demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a 'Jewish state' is a preemptive response to the one-state solution, as it attempts to remove the Israeli concern of an eventual Palestinian-majority state led by non-Jews. Although Palestinians have thus far resisted granting such a concession, it does represent another card for Palestinians to potentially play to secure a deal.

33 In this scenario, a popular resistance campaign could still be successful, but 'success' would not longer be about a Palestinian state, but rather civil rights for Palestinians within Israel and the territories.

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Middle East Brief

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Dr. Peter Krause

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