

Beyond the Rhetoric — Hamas' Strategies to Bridge the Gap between Ideology and Interests

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Abstract — Any institution seeking self-preservation faces a discrepancy and trade-off between its stated, idealistic, long-term ideology, and its compromising, immediate interests. The first is a source of popular legitimacy; the second ensures day-to-day survival. Hamas, an Islamist movement and the *de facto* government of the Gaza Strip, does not escape this dilemma. Hamas is a pragmatic, rational actor which knows that permanence violence toward Israel, though in line with its ideology, is not a sustainable policy. Hamas cannot afford the continual loss of human and material capital, and is accountable to foreign actors. Still, this ideological extremism results in the ideology-interests inconsistency being magnified. The movement thus has come up with innovative rhetorical strategies and justificatory discourses to bridge the gap. These bridging strategies can be explained in light of the distinction between fundamental and operative ideologies, as well as the theory of framing. The result of these necessary practices is that the ideological goals get blurred with immediate interests. This mix is what ultimately drives Hamas' strategy and decision-making process.

Keywords: Hamas; Gaza; legitimacy; political Islam; decision-making; ideology; interests; accountability.

Résumé — Toute institution ayant pour but sa propre préservation est confrontée à un décalage et à un compromis entre son idéologie idéaliste de long-terme, et ses intérêts immédiats. La première est une source de légitimité politique ; les seconds garantissent la survie au jour le jour. Le Hamas, un mouvement islamiste, gouvernement *de facto* de la bande de Gaza, n'échappe pas à ce dilemme. Le Hamas est un acteur rationnel et pragmatique, conscient que l'action violente permanente contre Israël, quoique conforme à son idéologie, n'est pas une politique durable : le Hamas ne peut pas se permettre de perdre en permanence son capital humain et matériel, et doit rendre des comptes à d'autres acteurs internationaux. L'extrémisme du Hamas conduit à une incohérence amplifiée entre idéologie et intérêts. Le groupe a ainsi développé des stratégies rhétoriques et des discours justificatifs innovants pour combler cet écart. Ces stratégies de *bridging* peuvent être analysées à la lumière de la distinction entre idéologies fondamentale et opérative, ainsi que par l'approche du *framing*. Cependant, ces méthodes entraînent un effacement de la distinction entre objectifs idéologiques et intérêts immédiats. Le processus de décision du Hamas est donc dirigé par ce mélange entre idéologie et intérêt.

Mots-clés : Hamas ; Gaza ; légitimité ; l'islam politique ; prise de décisions ; idéologie ; intérêts ; responsabilité.

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Introduction

Any actor of international relations permanently faces the risk of a discrepancy, in terms of decision-making, between its stated ideology and its immediate interests. For its leadership, both the short-term interests and the long-term ideological goals are crucial, and one cannot be sacrificed in the name of the other. Indeed, if we are to proceed on the assumption that an institution's ultimate goal is self-preservation, it can be argued that while its immediate interests must be satisfied in order to ensure its day-to-day survival, its stated ideology must not be overshadowed as this is what gives the institution its popular legitimacy. *Both* are necessary to the institution's self-preservation.

The problem arising in this dialectic is that ideology and interests often conflict. Ideologies may be conceived of as long-term goals, while interests are immediate and address the needs of the hour. Ideologies tend to be absolute, idealistic and uncompromising, while interests most often reflect a pragmatic approach. Ideologies reflect the genuine aims of the group producing them, while interests arise from external pressures, compromises with other actors, and adaptation to the current context. The institution, therefore, has to make a decision on which balance to maintain. Numerous factors can influence an actor's position regarding the ideology-interests dilemma. The critical move it needs to make, however, is not so much the realization of an optimal balance, but rather, the creation of a compelling rhetoric bridging the gap between the two. Building an illusion of consistency with justificatory discourses, the organization can both ensure its daily survival through pragmatic decisions *and* preserve the popular legitimacy based on its ideology, which appears to not have been betrayed.

In this paper, I focus on the case of Hamas. Hamas is a Palestinian Islamist movement, officially created in 1987, at the beginning of the first Intifada, as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza, and has played a major role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and peace processes ever since its inception (Abu-Amr, 1993). Hamas' ideological crucible is twofold: Islamist, and violent/revolutionary. On the one hand, it has a clear Islamist heritage from the Muslim Brotherhood and seeks the Islamization of the Palestinian society. On the other hand, its violent, revolutionary approach to the struggle for Palestine breaks from the traditional reformist line of the Brotherhood. Though lacking international recognition, its *de facto* control of the Gaza Strip makes it a very standard state-actor of international relations (Seurat, 2014). It has a well-established administration and leadership, as well as relatively consistent policies. These policies, however, cannot escape the ideology-interests dilemma. Hamas is particularly interesting in that regard, because it has come up with innovative ways to bridge its ideology and interests, thereby preserving its legitimacy and ensuring its survival. *What exactly are the points of discrepancy between Hamas' ideology and interests, and the strategies it deploys to suppress the gaps?*

I attempt to answer this question by looking at four main aspects of Hamas' decision-making process. First, in light of the distinction between fundamental ideology and operative ideology, I assess the level of discrepancy between Hamas' long-term, idealistic goals and its short-term, pragmatic ones, and in the process demonstrate Hamas' ability to rationally articulate an adaptive, dual strategy between the two. Second, I look at

how two conflicting sources of legitimacy for Hamas — the logic of revolution and the logic of the state — shape its ideology–interest balance. Third, I address the issue of Hamas' double accountability, domestic and foreign. Lastly, using the framing approach, I analyze the rhetoric Hamas deploys to bridge the ideology–interests discrepancy, framing pragmatic decision in Islamic terms.

As I will attempt to show, there is no clear dichotomy between ideology and interests, as they largely affect one another, and Hamas' Islamist discourse is both a resource for the legitimation of pragmatic action, and a constricting handicap on interest-driven options.

Between Idealism and Pragmatism

Hamas as a Rational Actor

Hamas is plagued by the image of a radical group interested solely in the destruction of the state of Israel. While it is true that the Hamas Charter — Hamas' ideological basis — firmly affirms these principles, Hamas is much more than its Charter. It is fundamentalist, but not fanatical. It is a rational, flexible actor, able to adjust its policies to the realities on the ground. This is not to say that Hamas is moderate. Its Charter leaves no room for ambiguity with regard to its revolutionary, Islamist stance, with a will to destroy the state of Israel and to establish an Islamic state on all of former Mandatory Palestine. However, Hamas is certainly smarter, savvier, and more complex than how it is portrayed by the West. The depiction of Hamas as irrational and fanatical fails to recognize its ability to assess accurately its own short-term interests: the preservation of its authority over the Gaza Strip, the continued support of its foreign donors and supporters, and the security of its material and human capital (Wagemarkers, 2010).

Simply put, Hamas is not a prisoner of its ideology. Most of its political output is not actually in line with the Charter. Menachem Klein (2007) describes Hamas as “pragmatic and action-directed, rather than theological and ideological.” It is very conscious that the implementation of its ideology on the ground requires compromise. When its own ideology presents a threat to its survival, Hamas is always prepared to deviate from it. Thus, Hamas' decision-making is a combination of ideological intransigence and of pragmatic realpolitik.

Long-Term versus Short-Term: A Dual Strategy

Martin Seliger (1970) has drawn a distinction between two types of ideologies. On the one hand, fundamental ideology consists of an absolute set of goals and beliefs. On the other hand, operative ideology consists of pragmatic, compromising goals. There is a constant tension between fundamental and operative ideologies. Klein (2007) has applied Seliger's theoretical framework to Hamas and shown how the uncompromising Hamas Charter, with its long-term, visionary end, corresponds to fundamental ideology. By contrast, Hamas' flexibility in response to the fluctuating situation on the ground reflects its operative ideology.

The central difference between fundamental and operative ideology is their time frame. In the case of Hamas, we can equate Seliger's fundamental ideology to long-term, ideology-driven strategy, and operational ideology to short-term, interest-driven strategy. History tells us that this pragmatic approach has proved, often, to be more important than ideological principles in the eyes of the Hamas leadership. We will focus here on three examples.

The signature by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) in 1993, which would lead to the Oslo Accords, was severely condemned by Hamas. The Hamas Charter rejected all the major principles on which the DOP was founded, i.e., the principle of direct negotiations with Israel, Yassir Arafat's official rejection of terrorism (that is, of violence as a means of resistance), the relinquishing of most of Mandatory Palestine to Israel, and the acceptance of Israel as a state alongside the future Palestinian state. Hamas' opposition to the Oslo process went further than words: the year 1996 was marked by a series of suicide bombings — attributed to both Hamas and the Islamic Jihad — unprecedented in Israel. Yet, the popular and international infatuation for the Oslo Accords and the two-state solution, as well as the new reality on the ground created by the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) forced Hamas to adapt. Thus, in order to preserve its domestic and foreign legitimacy, and not to be sidelined from the Palestinian political game, Hamas mitigated its criticism towards the Oslo process from its official line (Kristianasen, 1999), which it would not have done had it acted only on an ideological basis. This decision was clearly interest driven.

During the second Intifada, Hamas pursued, first, a militant policy, engaging in violence and conducting several suicide bombings. Then, from mid-2002, it reduced this militancy by a great extent, maintaining a low profile. At the end of June 2003, the Hamas leadership unilaterally declared a *hudna* ("truce"), which only lasted for a couple of weeks, and in 2005, it declared a *tahdi'a* ("calming"). Both the *hudna* and the *tahdi'a* involved a halting of violent operations. They were the logical consequence of Hamas realizing that its immediate interests were no longer consistent with continuous attacks, because they resulted in massive Israeli retaliation. Hamas' most immediate interest became survival, and it could not afford the loss of equipment, infrastructure and lives. Therefore, it implemented the *hudna* in the aftermath of Israel's operation "Defensive Shield" in 2002, and the *tahdi'a* after operation "Rainbow" led in 2004, both substantially threatening Hamas' material and human capital. Even more striking is the truce agreed in 2004 between the two top Hamas leaders in Gaza, Ahmad Yassin and Abdel Aziz ar-Rantisi, and Israel. Hamas conceded that "it is difficult to liberate all our land at this stage, so we accept a phased liberation" (Klein, 2007). Pragmatism was characterized here by the shift from total to gradual objectives.

More recently, Hamas has refrained from stepping in during the ongoing uprising that began in October 2015, which has been characterised by a number of stabbings. As Leila Seurat (2015) explained in an interview to the Huffington Post, Hamas is still licking its wounds from the 2014 operation "Protective Edge," and has adopted a balance between ideology and interests on the matter, supporting the uprising only through words:

Hamas affirmed clearly its support for the [October 2015] uprising, while refusing to fire rockets. Its security forces, moreover, prevented any other armed faction [in Gaza] from engaging in operations against Israel. Hamas' support is thus limited to its discourse... Hamas is tired after the past three wars in Gaza, particularly the last one, and so, does not want to mobilize right now.*

In all these instances, Hamas' pragmatism is not a simple rejection of its long-term ideological goals. Rather, Hamas adopted a dual strategy of both short and long-term goals. This two-level strategy consists of adding short-term, temporary goals to the unchanged, ultimate objectives. This allows Hamas to avoid blatantly rejecting its ideological principles every time it takes an interest-driven decision. By claiming that the addition of these intermediary goals is part of an incremental process towards the ultimate ends, Hamas enjoys flexibility in decision-making and preserves the legitimacy it draws for its ideological intransigency.

Leaders Inside and Outside the Gaza Strip

Hamas' balance between ideology-driven and interest-driven strategies depends largely on the geographical position of its leaders. Typically, Hamas' leaders in exile attach more importance to ideological objectives than those in Gaza who are facing the day-to-day hardships of life under siege and are more conscious of immediate concerns. This division, though not perfectly neat, shapes Hamas' decision-making process to a significant extent (Bhasin & Hallward, 2013). During the Oslo years, Klein (2007) argues, there were "two ways of thinking the organization," with the most extreme officials, Khalid Misha'al and Ímad al-Ámani, based in Hamas' office in Damascus, and the supporters of the diplomatic-pragmatic approach, Hasan Yusuf and Isma'il Haniyya, based in Gaza.

Klein (2009) also notes that after the establishment of the PA and the announcement of general elections, "a debate ensued in the Hamas leadership, between those who demanded a boycott of the election on ideological grounds and pragmatists who advocated suspending a decision until the conditions [of the elections] were determined." Similarly, the assassination of both senior leaders of Hamas in Gaza, Yassin and ar-Rantisi, by Israel in 2004, caused the leadership to shift towards outsiders, which, explains Gruber, resulted in a resurgence of ideology-driven violence since the new leadership remained disconnected from conditions on the ground and unaffected by repercussions, and could see no reason for moderation. It thus continued to advocate violent militancy from the safety of its offices in Damascus.

Logic of Revolution versus Logic of the State

In this section, I establish the opposition of two different logics of legitimacy and accountability: the logic of revolution and the logic of the state. In the revolutionary logic, the organization is legitimized if it manages to display a convincing ideological rhetoric attracting masses. All the major Palestinian resistance movements were founded on a

* Our translation.

revolutionary logic. In the logic of the state, the ruling organization is in charge of a population and draws legitimacy from its ability to administrate it successfully and provide the people with satisfying living conditions. The two main Palestinian political organizations, namely, the PLO and Hamas, entered, at some point in their history, the logic of the state.

The Vulnerability of the Ruler: Democratic Legitimacy

Following its foundation as an armed branch/proxy of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza, Hamas drew tremendous popular legitimacy as a revolutionary movement displaying promising and uncompromising goals. This lasted until Hamas became accountable as a state, after its takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007 following its victory in the 2006 elections. However, unlike the PLO which abandoned the logic of revolution in favour of the logic of the state following the establishment of the PA, Hamas tried to maintain a balance between both logics.

This was, and still is, particularly challenging for Hamas. For instance, firing rockets to enhance its legitimacy as a revolutionary movement results in Israeli retaliation profoundly affecting the Gazans' safety, which hampers Hamas' legitimacy as a state. We see here how the revolutionary logic overlaps almost perfectly with Hamas' ideological goals, whereas the logic of the state corresponds to shorter-term interests and day-to-day survival.

Even more importantly, one should note how instead of pouring into a greater reserve of legitimacy, the two logics result in increased accountability; in fact, in terms of legitimacy, this is more of a curse than a blessing. After 2007, Hamas faced a trade-off between the two logics, a problem which it did not have to worry about beforehand. Hamas inherited domestic responsibilities, such as managing issues of poverty, employment, economy, public services; and became accountable for these tasks. Writing before the takeover, Are Knudsen (2005) argued that "it is neither Hamas's political programme nor its ideology, but rather the living conditions [in Gaza]" that formed the basis of Hamas' political support. That was true as long as Hamas avoided accountability in Gaza but after 2007, difficult living conditions combined with Hamas' state status resulted in a reverse outcome.

Acquiring legitimacy through the logic of the state also requires engagement in political processes and the building of a democratic system. Hamas' rule is authoritarian, and the democratic deficit in Gaza has become particularly problematic since the outbreak of the Arab Spring. The popular challenge to repressive rule throughout the region did not spare Hamas. Popular discontent pushed Hamas to seek out solutions to contain the uproar, which it found in increasingly repressive behaviour. This, in turn, gave rise to more popular hostility (Milton-Edwards, 2013). However, Hamas has engaged, to a limited extent, in electoral processes in order to strengthen its legitimacy. For instance, when Hamas took part in the 2006 general elections — in spite of its ideological rejection of the PA — one of its motives was to pander to popular approval of elections (Bhasin & Hallward, 2013) and thereby to consolidate its legitimacy as a political faction engaging in democratic processes.

Hamas' Grassroots Welfare System

Hamas' transformation into a de facto Gazan state meant that it could no longer hide behind the Israeli occupation of Gaza, which ended in 2005, or present itself as an underground, opposition movement. Nevertheless, it was largely prepared for this increased accountability. A large branch of Hamas' infrastructure is dedicated to welfare and charity services, a feature inherited from the Muslim Brotherhood (Abu-Amr, 1993). Hamas' social-civilian wing, a dense network of institutions providing services in multiples sectors (Bhasin and Hallward, 2013) including education, health, religion, leisure and charity, (especially for the poor, widows, orphans and families of martyrs) is actually the core of the overall organization, both in terms of budget — with an estimated 95% of Hamas' revenues devoted to its social service in 2005 (Knusden, 2005) — and of popular legitimacy. As Eyal Pascovich (2012) puts it, “whoever seeks the real source of power of Hamas ... will find it in [its] daily activity of assisting the needy, educating the young generation, and assimilating religious values.”

Thus, Hamas actually draws a considerable part of its popular legitimacy from its provision to the people of satisfying living conditions, that is, from the logic of the state. Its social-civilian wing secures a sizeable mass of supporters and significant control over financial resources, namely, the *waqf* (Islamic mortmain properties) and *zakat* (Islamic charity tax) systems (Knusden, 2005). This, however, does not mean that Hamas' goal in providing these services is purely utilitarian; the ideological-Islamic principle of charity is not of negligible importance. Similarly, it would be inaccurate to explain Hamas' will to secure a popular base through an ultimate goal of conducting violent operations. Looking at Hamas' historical background, the provision of welfare services clearly preceded terrorism (Pascovich, 2012). Hamas' violent attacks against Israel (perpetrated by its military wing) and its welfare apparatus are clearly separated, (Bhasin & Hallward, 2013) and represent Hamas' dual strategy, maintaining a subtle balance between the logic of revolution and the logic of the state as sources of legitimation.

Foreign Accountabilities

Hamas, as an actor of international relations, is entangled in the broader geopolitical situation, and is engaged in asymmetrical relations with Turkey, Syria, Qatar, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Western donor community, to name just a few. These actors provide Hamas with financial, logistical and diplomatic support, in exchange of which Hamas is accountable to them. Yet, Hamas remains accountable to the population in its ruling of Gaza. Not only may the interests of these foreign actors and the Gazans clash, but the interests of different foreign actors, which Hamas cannot afford to vex, add further conflict to the situation. Hamas is thus in a tricky situation of double accountability, domestic and foreign.

Regional Powers

Hamas relies heavily on Arab partners for its survival. Financially speaking, domestic sources of revenue, *waqf* and *zakat* only made up 15% of the organization's budget, as estimated in 2005. The remaining 85% were provided by foreign donors, the most

important being the wealthy rentier states of the Gulf (Knusden, 2005) namely, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Hamas' third major partner in the region is Iran. All these powers see Hamas as a proxy, useful both to develop their influence over the region, and to legitimize themselves in the eyes of their population, appearing as champions of the Palestinian cause. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are notorious competitors, but the most salient division is between Saudi Arabia and Iran, currently engaged in a Middle Eastern cold war.

In this situation, it is difficult for Hamas to satisfy one side and to act as its perfect proxy without angering the other. Hamas leaders decided to keep a low profile in the Saudi–Iranian clash and avoided taking a diplomatic stance on the matter, not wanting to jeopardize their relations with either state. This tightrope walk has been going on for decades, shaped by the regional crises. For instance, Saudi Arabia was Hamas' top funder from 2000 to 2004, before scaling back its support due to US pressure. Iran took over this spot but Iran–Hamas relations deteriorated quickly after Iran sided with, and Hamas against, Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian regime in 2011. Hamas is currently trying to maintain a somewhat neutral position. For example, while Hamas' main offices outside the Gaza Strip are located in Qatar, a GCC country, Hizbullah, an Iranian proxy, still provides Hamas with military aid and training.

With the Arab Spring dramatically shaking the geopolitical landscape of the region, Hamas has had a hard time maintaining cordial relations with all neighbouring regimes and was forced into strategic shifts. The most important one was the evacuation and relocation of Hamas' external headquarters from Damascus to Doha in 2011, following its public disavowal of the Assad regime. Emir ath-Thani's official visit to Gaza in 2012 was a symbol of Qatar's endorsement of Hamas which, alongside Qatar's monetary support, allowed Hamas to compensate for its lack of democratic legitimacy with renewed "financial legitimacy" (Milton-Edwards, 2013). As for Egypt, while the Muslim Brotherhood, in power with Mohamed Morsi at the helm in 2012–2013, was a natural and historical ally of Hamas, the current counter-revolutionary regime governed by as-Sissi displayed unambiguous hostility towards Hamas, attempting to list it as a terrorist organization. Lastly, Turkey, also a regional hegemon in the Middle East, supports Hamas only to a limited extent since Ankara has relatively close economic ties with Israel, which it seeks to preserve.

Western Powers and Foreign Humanitarian Aid

Hamas' survival also depends on the international (mostly Western) donor community, providing humanitarian and developmental aid. As Tamer Qarmout and Daniel Béland (2012) argue, aid is never neutral, and always conditional. In the case of Hamas, there is a political conditionality of foreign aid. Officially, aid is conditioned to Hamas' commitment to democratization and good governance. However, in reality, regardless of Hamas' efforts since its takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007, politically conditioned foreign aid is consistently "directed at bypassing, isolating, and weakening the Hamas administration in Gaza." Selective aid became a punitive tool Western powers use to undermine Hamas. The international boycott and no-contact policy the West adopted vis-à-vis Hamas was a devastating blow to the economy of the Gaza Strip, seriously threatening Hamas' stability as a ruler.

Suffering from negative publicity, Hamas continues its struggle to obtain recognition, in the eyes of the European Union, the US and the UN, of the legitimacy it draws from the 2006 elections. As a result, it must take decisions that are seemingly inconsistent with its ideology, but which reflect its accountability to Western powers through a dependency on their aid. This explains Hamas' decision to participate in the traditional political competition from the mid-2000s, intended to prove to the world its good will to act as a regular political party, helping the movement gather funding from the international donor community. Bhasin and Hallward (2013) argue that “pragmatic concerns of funding [are] the most compelling explanation of *why* Hamas decided to participate in elections.” Furthermore, one can understand Hamas' stepping down from military activism in 2002 during the second Intifada as a reaction to the international diplomatic pressure to put a stop to violence in order to engage in the “Roadmap for peace” resolution plan to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Wagemarkers, 2010). In the same vein, Hamas' choice to clearly separate its military wing — the Qassam brigades — from its social-civilian welfare wing reflects its dedication to improving its image by displaying its charity work and hiding its violent operations, thereby maintaining good relations with donors who reject these military activities.

Bridging the Ideology–Interests Discrepancy

The Framing Strategy

Drawing from the social movement theory's concept of framing, one can analyze justifying discourses for the changes in decision-making and foreign policy (Goffman, 1974). Typically, an actor shifting its focus from ideology to immediate interests must, in order to justify both the change in policy and its apparent contradiction with the ideology, reframe its new policy within the ideology. The main tool of framing is rhetoric, that is, a manner of communication that highlights and hides certain elements of reality. In the context of the ideology-interests dilemma, the goal is to mould reality into one specific interpretation, which purports to tell the whole story, and convinces the audience that there is no contradiction between the interest-driven policies and the ideology. This rhetoric may require a “stretched” re-interpretation of the ideology. At the end of the day, the goal is to make any shift in policy — which is virtually always dictated by interest — appear consistent with the long-term ideology, thereby preserving the legitimacy drawn from the seemingly unaltered ideology while actually addressing the needs of the hour.

It should be noted here that any political decision, be it consistent or not with the actor's ideology, is grounded in immediate interests. The framing strategy thus happens regardless of whether or not the policy is consistent with, or contradicting, the ideology. Even a decision seemingly consistent with ideology remains, as we shall show, primarily interest-driven. The aim of framing, then, is to conceal the interests that affected the decision, in order to make it appear as genuinely, and solely, ideology-driven.

Hamas' leadership has been particularly innovative and efficient in finding solutions to bridge the gap between their interest-driven decisions and the fundamentalist ideology (Klein, 2007, Wagemarkers, 2010, Seurat, 2014). I focus here on two main

examples where Hamas has used the framing strategy to make its policies appear solely driven by its long-term ideological goals, disguising their less glorious, more pragmatic aspects. I address Hamas' military actions against Israel, particularly over the course of the second Intifada, and Hamas' participation or non-participation in the Palestinian electoral process over time.

Military Actions against Israel

Joes Wagemarkers (2010) has applied the concept of framing to Hamas' decision-making process during the second Intifada. He showed how the movement's leadership framed its decisions within the ideology both in the first phase of the uprising, when Hamas' militancy was at its peak, and in the post-2002 phase, during the stepping-down of armed action. Until mid-2002, Hamas' military action against Israel was congruent with its ideology. Yet, the decision to engage in violent resistance was driven by opportunism: Hamas wanted to take advantage of the weakness of the PA and of popular anger towards Israel. Hamas' goal, in terms of framing, was to put ideology at the centre of its decision. It thus insisted on a core principle of its charter: *tawhid* ("unity"). The concept of unity fluctuates in the mouths of Hamas leaders, referring either to the Muslim *umma* or to the Palestinian people. In any case, Hamas affirmed that unity was necessary to succeed in the establishment of a Palestinian state, and that the only way to achieve unity was through armed resistance. Hamas further insisted on the *makasib* ("gains") that the intifada would secure in the long-term objective of recovering Palestine.

From mid-2002 onwards, Hamas largely de-escalated violent operations, for reasons we have highlighted *supra*. The leadership had to come up with a new rhetoric in order to justify this position, which stood in stark contrast to its ideology. For instance, the 2003 *hudna* and the 2005 *tahdi'a* were two different words for a perfectly identical reality triggered by the same pragmatic needs, that is, the unilateral suspension of armed struggle. Hamas used the word *tahdi'a* in 2005 because the concept of *hudna* had already been used in 2003, and that truce had been a failure. The word *tahdi'a* was thus a rhetorical trick. Hamas moreover kept using the concepts of *tawhid* and *makasib*, completely inverting their meaning and implications. In terms of unity, Hamas suddenly tempered its discourse: resistance was no longer building unity, but the other way around. Since, at the time, Palestinian factions were divided — thus, not united — on which strategy to adopt in terms of resistance, Hamas argued that the efficiency of resistance was in jeopardy and that a pause was therefore needed. In other words, before mid-2002, preserving unity meant continuing the attacks; after mid-2002, it meant stopping the attacks. As for the concept of gains, Hamas insisted upon the gains of keeping quiet, as opposed to those of resisting. It drew attention to the advantages that a truce entailed, which would serve the long-term ideological goal of liberating Palestine: liberation of prisoners, cessation of violence on the civilian population, etc. We see here how Hamas, through the subtle use of rhetoric, managed to reframe its pragmatic decisions into its ideology. Interviewed in 2008, the senior leader of Hamas, Khalid Misha'al, illustrated the non-permanence of armed struggle and the periods of calm and truce with an inventive metaphor:

The history of the Palestinian Revolution has developed in what I call waves. It is a history of ebb and flow, a cycle of struggle, like farming. You prepare the soil, sow the

seed, reap the crop, then prepare the soil and sow again to reap a new harvest. It is not a continuum of consistent intensity, but cyclical (Rabbani, 2008).

Oslo Process and Palestinian Elections

As explained *supra*, the Oslo Accords, which set up the PA and the Palestinian electoral process, were explicitly rejected by the Hamas leadership. The Oslo process contradicted Hamas' ideology. However, Hamas' condemnation of Oslo was also grounded in pragmatic concerns. The establishment of the PA, which was granted tremendous capabilities, power and legitimacy, was a harsh reality for Hamas, limiting its capacity to take action on the ground (Kristianasen, 1999). In terms of interests, Oslo was a disaster for Hamas, so the fact that it also contradicted its ideology was a blessing. Hamas could always invoke its grand ideological principles to reject Oslo, even if the rejection was an interest-driven decision.

For instance, the Hamas boycott of the 1996 general elections — a direct consequence of Oslo — was in line with its principle of refusing compromise and negotiation with Israel, and was indeed justified — framed — as such. However, the decision was actually interest driven: Hamas knew that its popular base was not large enough to secure a majority of seats in the elections and that participating in the electoral process would not result in a gain of political power. In other words, the participation in the 1996 elections was not in Hamas' interests (Klein, 2009). Yet, it invoked ideology, describing the PLO's participation in the Oslo process as act of treason against the Palestinian cause, in order to draw legitimacy and support from and for its non-participation. Ten years later, as its popular support had risen sufficiently, Hamas displayed no reluctance to participate in the elections because it had become in its interest to do so. This strategy proved to be profitable: Hamas won the elections and would have, in theory, acceded to the state resources of the PA had a quasi-civil war not broken out. In order to erase the blatant inconsistency between its participation and its public rejection of the Oslo process, Hamas once again displayed an innovative justification, conceptually separating the Oslo Accords from the PA institutions and processes. Leila Seurat, in a November 2015 interview, described this resourceful discourse as such:

In March [2005,] the Cairo Accords, signed by all Palestinian factions, consecrated Hamas' participation in the electoral game. Until then, it had only participated in local elections. Hamas had refused to participate in the 1996 legislative elections. It considered engaging in this process to mean recognizing the Palestinian Authority, and legitimizing the Oslo Accords. [In 2006,] to explain its about-face, it argued that the Oslo Accords are henceforth dead and therefore participation in the PA structures no longer legitimizes them. However, it is obvious that, beyond its discourses, the objective of Hamas was, undeniably, to take advantage of the resources that the PA, born from the Oslo agreements, had to offer.[†]

[†] Our translation.

Conclusion

Hamas, as any organization, faces a gap between its ideology and its interests. This discrepancy has several sources. We have addressed Hamas' need for short-term survival, the influence of its leaders inside or outside the Gaza Strip, Hamas' accountability as a revolutionary movement, as a state organization, as a proxy for regional powers, and as an actor depending on aid and recognition from the West. Hamas is a rational actor, able both to deviate from its fundamentalist ideological foundations if need be, and to articulate a framing rhetoric in order to hide the inconsistency of its policies with its ideologies. On that matter, it has proved particularly innovative in finding ways to implement policies blatantly contradictory to its creeds.

Our analysis relies on a distinction between the concepts of ideology and interest. Nevertheless, we recognize, just as Seurat does, that there is no binary dichotomy between the two, especially in the case of Hamas, where ideology is constantly stretched to accommodate contingent interests. The division between interests and ideology is never absolute and neat, but blurred and constantly shifting. Ideology is more than a smokescreen to conceal underlying pragmatism, nor is it the sole source of decision-making. Hamas uses ideology as a tool to secure popular legitimacy, which is in turn necessary for the organization's self-preservation. Preserving its own ideology thus becomes, for Hamas, an immediate interest. We see here how ideology and interest are closely interlinked concepts. As Leila Seurat (2015) argues:

Ideology is as much a solution to problems as it is a potential source of conflict. ... Recognizing this complexity allows us to overcome the simplistic, prejudiced view according to which the use of ideology characterizes the more offensive periods, whereas more defensive periods would be marked by a return to realism.‡

Thus, as far as Hamas is concerned, the Islamist ideological repertoire is a resource of legitimacy as much as a constraint on decision-making.

Lastly, I must acknowledge some of the blind spots of this contribution. One would be the impact of Hamas' relations with the other Palestinian factions — mainly, the PLO/Fatah — in its ideology-interest dilemma. Another would be the role of civil society vis-à-vis the strategies deployed by Hamas. To what extent do these stratagems actually deceive the population? How civil society reacts to the tactics discussed in this paper is worth investigating, as the Hamas leadership has to, in turn, adapt and respond to this feedback.

‡ Our translation.

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