In recent years the controversy over terrorism has reached such a frenzy that there are few people in the world who haven't heard of the concept. With the hype following the September 11th attacks in the United States as well as others in Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, the mere suggestion of terrorism is almost an instant discredit to an organization in the international press. Though without a doubt many organization around the world embrace the strategic use of violence as a means to an end, the overuse of the word terrorist by radio pundits and political leaders without a proper analysis of historical, social and political events that influence the manifestation of militant groups in the world today leaves the public with a poor understanding of the roots of extremism as well
as potential solutions. Though identifying militant groups is important for the safety of civilians and sitting governments, the use of catchphrase generalizations to describe complex and deeply-rooted conflicts in one of the oldest regions in the world works against peace-keeping efforts, and actually exacerbates conditions that create an environment conducive to violence and social unrest.

The term terrorism itself presents a problem in that there is not yet an agreed upon international consensus on what constitutes terrorism and what does not. Is a terrorist a renegade sociopath who blows up hospitals? Or a well-trained private militia bent on taking down the government? Could government forces perpetrate terrorist acts against an enemy army, or could grassroots resistance movements use terrorist tactics to oust an occupying force? The US Department of State has issued the following definition of terrorism: “A premeditated, politically motivated violence conducted in times of peace, perpetuated against non-combative targets by sub-national groups or clandestine state agents, usually intended to influence an audience to advance political ends.” (Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f(d)). This definition, used by the US State Department since 1983, excludes government violence during times of war; incidental killings of civilians, and underground resistance to occupying forces, and stipulates the systematic use of fear to spread an idea or achieve a goal.

The myriad theories that surround the psychology of terror present multiple interpretations on whether someone who engages in terrorism fits a distinct psychological profile or exhibits certain warning signs the rest of society to intuit in order to prevent violence. Though there have been many studies, most have been unable to show much evidence proving a distinct psychological syndrome to predict who will be a terrorist and who will not. According to Kruglanski in “Terrorism between "Syndrome" and "Tool"”, the use of terror by militant groups is better considered through the lense of a tool rather than a psychological syndrome, by which frustrated groups are able to use strategic violence as a means to an end. (Kruglanski)

The most famous and well-known terrorist groups today are overwhelmingly variants of Militant Islam, with an overarching objective of achieving religious jihad in order to promote and
The groups identified as terrorist organizations by the US Department of State are of varying degrees of extremism and found in pockets all over the world. While some have unifying goals, such as creating a political atmosphere that is consistent with Shari'a law, which addresses many aspects of society including politics, economics and social welfare as well as religious practices, most are distinct in their structure and specific interpretation of Islam.

Perhaps the most famous plight of Muslims today, and the focus of much contention and strife especially among Militant Islamic groups, is that of the Israel-Palestine territory dispute, which has roots back to the Crusades but truly erupted when Allied Powers redesigned international borders after World War II, designating what is now Israel and Jerusalem as the official Jewish homeland, resulting in what Palestinians perceived as a way to exclude them from their ancestral homeland and the holy city of Jerusalem, which is a sacred site in Islam as well as Judaism and Christianity. The enormous influx of Jewish immigration into what is now Israel rapidly diminished Palestinian territories and continues to be a source of contention today, as Palestinians and Israelis both claim the right to claim an ancestral homeland with Jerusalem as their capital city. The militant Islamist group Hamas finds itself amidst the central players in this conflict, and is a quintessential example of the complexities and multifaceted nature of the Militant Islam movement.

Hamas was founded as a branch of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in 1987 amidst increasing tension in Gaza between Israeli and Palestinian forces and a growing frustration among the Palestinian base that the Brotherhood was not doing enough to promote the liberation of occupied territories. Decades of war and displacement on both sides resulted in hundreds of thousands of Jewish and Palestinian refugees having to flee Israel and surrounding Arab countries, in the case of Jewish refugees. To this day, the issue of refugees and their “right to return” remains one of the primary goals of Hamas.

The Muslim Brotherhood had been established in Palestine for some time and had focused primarily on social welfare projects, including building and funding schools, sports clubs, health care,
etc. The Brotherhood in Palestine consistently said that in the path to jihad, the first step towards establishing an Islamic State in Palestine was educating the masses and reforming society as a whole. In other words, society was not yet ready for jihad as the Brotherhood considered an Islamic transformation of society and abandonment of secular ideology to be a prerequisite for liberation of Palestine. This was in contrast to some public opinion that placed first importance on the establishment of a liberated Palestinian state and ending foreign occupation of their ancestral homeland and sacred sites. Because the Brotherhood consistently refused to engage in armed activities in the fight against the Israeli occupation, as well as the secular political power in Palestine, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), there was an undercurrent of discontent in some circles about how to best go about the religious jihad of reclaiming Palestine.

In 1988 a traffic accident that killed several Palestinian civilians resulted in widespread rioting and an uprising against Israeli occupation (the driver was Israeli). This event is called the First Intifada and it basically forced the hand of members in the Brotherhood to acknowledge the importance of the liberation movement and act to make it come about. This was how Skeyk Ahmed Yassin, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood at the time, along with 6 other members, established a separate branch of Muslim leaders addressing the issue of occupation and the liberation of Palestine, with an emphasis on armed struggle as action. The group was named Hamas -meaning Islamic Resistance Movement- derived from the word for “devotion and zeal in the path of Allah”

The newly formed Hamas released a charter outlining its major goals in 1988, which stated that Hamas was a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood of Palestine and its members were Muslims who fear God and raise the banner of jihad in the face of oppressors. The charter is heavily focused on reclaiming Palestine and replacing the Israeli State and Palestinian Territories with an Islamic Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. The document states that Hamas is humanistic, and therefore tolerant of other religions if they do not block their efforts. However, it states that renouncing any part of the Palestinian territories would be akin to renouncing Islam and unacceptable. Expelling
foreign occupiers, namely Israelis, is referenced specifically in the document, which has caused considerable tension due to references of killing Jews. Since its inception, Hamas has gained notoriety for various attacks on Israel, including suicide bombings, and continued animosity with Israeli Defense forces. Hamas has been named a terrorist organization by the United States, Israel, Japan and the EU but is not considered to be a terrorist group by Russia or any of the Arab states (Abu-Amr).

Hamas, like the Muslim Brotherhood has also done considerable work in social building and needed services that are often not being provided elsewhere, notably offering housing and other assistance to displaced Palestinians due to conflict with Israeli Armed Forces as well as free or low cost health clinics, relief programs, orphanages, education centers, etc. There are three wings of authority within the organization that address different aspects of their work, (political, social, military) but the Majlis al-Shura or Consultative Counsel made up of representatives from Gaza, West Bank, former prisoners and exiled external leaders, is regarded as the decision making body of Hamas. The military wing, Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (named after a Palestinian nationalist who was killed during conflicts with British forces in 1935), technically operates independently of the political and social wings of Hamas, thereby blurring the lines whether orders to commit acts of violence come directly from the Consultative Council or acted on independently. Winning a sweeping victory in the 2006 elections, Hamas gained control of the government in Palestine and further confused its status as potential terrorists or a legitimate organization and political party. The multifaceted nature of Hamas confuses the black-and-white definition of “good guy” and “bad guy”, especially considering the broad base of support it enjoys from many Palestinians due to its extensive social assistance network (Usher).

According to Kruglanski, “The launching of terrorism (by a group or an individual perpetrator) requires a deliberate decision, based on the belief that it will (a) be instrumental to the perpetrator's objectives, (b) be better than any other means available, and (c) not undermine other salient objectives (e.g. economic welfare, the upholding of moral values).” (Kruglanski & Fishman, p.47) Violence, then, is not exclusively an act of crazed fanatics who have lost touch with reality but rather a cold,
calculated decision based on perceived losses and potential benefit to the terrorist group or individual cause, especially when it is considered that all other means of achieving that goal have been made obsolete or ineffectual. According to Jeoren Gunning in “Peace with Hamas? The Transforming Potential of Political Participation”, “[In] October 2003, 75 per cent of respondents to a national survey [in Palestine] stated that they supported a particular suicide operation while 56 per cent believed that 'current armed confrontations have helped the Palestinians achieve national rights in ways that negotiations could not'” (p.235).

Using this understanding of motivations behind the decision to use violence in the fight for a specific cause, Kruganski & Fishman point out that “By the same token, discouraging terrorism requires convincing the perpetrator that (a) this means is ineffectual; (b) there exist alternative, better means to the same ends; and (c) it constitutes a hindrance... to other salient objectives.” (Kruglanski & Fishman, p.47). However, the fact that Hamas is considered to be a terrorist organization by most of the world powers makes it an effective political pariah for negotiating. Although Hamas leaders have employed violence in the past, being labeled exclusively as a terrorist organization and subjected to targeted assassinations and systematic loss of internal leaders runs the risk of creating a vacuum of desperation that could be used to justify future acts of terror (Gunning). If Hamas is not engaged as a leader in peace agreements between Palestine and Israel, the integrity of the peace agreement may be at risk due to public support of Hamas as a political and social movement in Palestine, where they are widely considered to be a liberation movement rather than a terrorist organization (Abu-Amr).

The unwillingness of Israel and the US to negotiate with Hamas due to its terrorist status complicates the potential for successful peace talks, and creates more animosity and social tension which may contribute to continued violence (Gunning). Burgoon (2006) argues that social policies targeting social inequalities and poverty while creating a safety net for poorer countries may play a role in alleviating domestic terrorism, though he points out that simply improving economic activity does not necessarily mean a country is less likely to experience terrorism. Rather, he points to the increased
social cost of terrorist acts in a stable, productive environment as opposed to a chaotic, strife-filled one. Schnellenbach (2006) also suggests improving economic activity in affected areas to increase opportunity costs for terrorist organizations, but says that blanket-policies are less likely to be effective than those targeting only active terrorist organizations.

Due to Israel's superior military and political strength which is bolstered by political backing by the United States, as well as the Palestinian liberation Movement being considered a terrorist organization, Palestinians often feel coerced into accepting agreements without being represented. Ignoring Palestinian objective in peace talks seems to contribute to right-wing backlash, according to Usher (2006):

The election result also blew apart the Israeli-American paradigm, consecrated since 9/11, that the parameters for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict were Israel’s security, the U.S.-led “war on terror” (directed primarily at radical Islamist movements and/or truculent nationalist ones), and a scaled back Palestinian “statehood” in which Jewish settlements would remain on occupied territory and Palestinian refugees would have to forego the right of return to their lands. Responding, finally, to the deal that appeared to be emerging, the Palestinian electorate voted for a movement that champions armed resistance, invokes political Islam, does not seek negotiations, and does not recognize Israel, not only as an occupation beyond the 1967 lines but as a Jewish state behind them” p. 20

In spite of the arguably extreme measures called for in the initial charter released in 1988, Khaled Mishaal, the leader of Hamas has repeatedly said that Hamas would respect 1967 boundaries between Palestine and Israel with the provision that East Jerusalem be the capital of Palestine and refugees are granted the right of return, so long as the agreement were ratified by a public referendum. He insists that rather than adhering to the charter, Hamas ideology is more in line with the Electoral
agenda released in 2006, which stipulates the following:

- True Islam, with civilized achievements and political, economic, social, legal aspects are to be the frame of reference used to govern their way of life
- Historic Palestine is part of Arab/ Islamic land and ownership of that land is a right indigenous to Palestinians
- Palestinian people, even displaced, are a unified people and integral part of the global Muslim community
- Right of return must be granted to refugees and must be treated as an unalienable right that cannot be bargained for
- Similar recognition of Palestinian's indigenous right to the land, holy sites and natural resources in Palestine
- Reinforce and protect Palestinian national unity
- The issue of freeing imprisoned freedom fighters is of the utmost importance

Other aspects of the manifesto include a separation between executive, judicial and legislative branches of government, activating the role of the Constitutional Court, a reform of Judicial Supreme Court with members being chosen by election rather than credentials or connections, equality under law for all citizens in rights and duties, the right to security and protection from death, torture, and wrongful imprisonment for all citizens, fostering a culture of dialogue and freedom of the press (Abu-Amr).

Though peace accords have been successful in the past between Israel and Fatah, Hamas' secular counterpart which was previously considered a terrorist organization before the Oslo Accords, Western leaders have been reluctant to engage Hamas in a serious way. Mullin (2010) notes in her article *Islamist Challenges to the 'Liberal Peace' Discourse: The Case of Hamas and the Israel-Palestine*
'Peace Process'

Hamas Chief Khaled Meshaal has indicated that ‘Hamas now endorses the US attempt to negotiate an end to the occupation’, thus demonstrating a willingness to engage with the international process. Yet still there remains a strong reluctance on the part of the various actors involved in this process to provide Hamas with a seat at the negotiating table. In order to understand Israel’s and the international community’s intransigence over their refusal to engage with Hamas, it is necessary to consider the fact that, unlike Fatah, which has certainly been seen to pose a ‘strategic threat’ to Israeli ‘national security’ at various points in its history, Hamas also poses various epistemological and ontological challenges to the dominant normative framework that underpins the peace process. (531)

Peace agreements that refuse to seriously engage Hamas on key strategic agreements undermine the political, social and religious context in which Hamas exists, and risk falling into similar conflict patterns in which violence is seen as the last and only remaining tactic to achieve their goals. One-sided demands that Hamas renounce the use of violence or agree to uphold prior agreements made with Israel without making similar demands of Israel (Mullin) only prolong the conflict and lead Hamas leaders to believe they have no choice but to take matters into their own hands.
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