The Israel- PA- Hamas Triangle, IR Theory and State Formation

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Preliminary Draft

Abstract - How robust are the three basic paradigms – offensive realism, neorealism (sometimes referred to as defensive realism), or constructive accounts - in explaining international relations are fiercely debated in political science. So is the impact of the international system on state formation. The following study looks at the triangular relationship between Israel, the Abbas-led Palestinian Authority and Hamas in Gaza since the latter took over Gaza in 2007 to explore variation in state formation between the Abbas-led Palestinian Authority and the Hamas government through the lens of three major approaches in international relations, offensive realism, neorealism and constructivist accounts. All three would have varying impacts on state formation. The paper argues that the neorealist account comes closest to describing the relationship between the three political actors. The fine-tuned and intensive security cooperation between Israel and the PA is clearly levelled against the Hamas threat. Not only did the PA refrain from coming to the Hamas’ government’s aid during its three rounds of major conflict against Israel, as anticipated by offensive realism, it actively repressed anti-Israel demonstrations and violence against Israel in the PA during the rounds of conflict between Israel and Hamas. The price of Israeli protection for the PA is a truncated pattern of state formation. The virtue is that Israeli hegemony prevents perpetual civil war between a nationalist and more secular entity, the PA, and the theocratic Hamas government in Gaza.

Paper presented at the ECPR general conference, Prague, September 8, 2016
How robust are the three basic paradigms – offensive realism, neorealism (sometimes referred to as defensive realism), or constructive accounts - in explaining international relations are fiercely debated in political science. So is the impact of the international system on state formation. The following study looks at the triangular relationship between Israel, the Abbas-led Palestinian Authority and Hamas in Gaza since the latter took over Gaza in 2007 to explore variation in state formation between the Abbas-led Palestinian Authority and the Hamas government through the lens of three major approaches in international relations, offensive realism, neorealism and constructivist accounts. Offensive realism, with its focus on the balance of power, would predict greatest cooperation between the PA in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria as both balance against a far more powerful state that they rhetorically perceive as an occupying and expansionist state. Defensive realism with its focus on the balance of threat, would predict greater cooperation between Israel and the PA against Hamas, the force that expelled the PA from Gaza and whose grassroots presence in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria presents a grave threat to the PA. Constructivist accounts with its stress on identity politics would suggest that given the strong identity differences between the three sides– a Jewish Zionist Israel, a “secular” nationalist PA and an Islamist theocratic movement such as Hamas - that the relationship between each side and the other two would be totally inimical characterized by zero-sum games. All three would have varying impacts on state formation. Cooperation between the PA and Israel, as predicted by neorealism would translate into a truncated, semi-independent pattern of state formation for the PA and the emergence of a classical Weberian strong state for Hamas. A balance of power account would translate into maximal state formation for both the PA and Hamas and strong cooperation in other fields between them. Were the constructivist paradigm robust in explaining relationship between the triangle, we would expect robust state formation but without cooperation between the PA and Hamas governments. The paper argues that the neorealist account comes closest to describing the relationship between the three political actors. The fine-tuned and intensive security cooperation between Israel and the PA is clearly levelled against the Hamas threat. Not only did the PA refrain from coming to the Hamas’ government’s aid during its three rounds of major conflict against Israel, as anticipated by offensive realism, it actively repressed anti-Israel demonstrations and violence against Israel in the PA during the rounds of conflict between Israel and Hamas. The price of Israeli protection for the PA is a truncated pattern of state formation. The virtue is that Israeli hegemony prevents perpetual civil war between a nationalist and more secular entity, the PA, and the theocratic Hamas government in Gaza.

The article begins by generating hypotheses from the literature on offensive and defensive realism and constructivism regarding the relationship between the three actors.
Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas. These hypotheses are then tested in the subsequent sections against the patterns of behavior and political interactions between these three actors between 2007 and 2015. In the third section, we look at the implications of our finding on state formation in the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas State in Gaza.

**Generating Hypotheses from Offensive, Defensive Realism and Constructivist Accounts**

According to Taliaerro (2001) "Offensive realism holds that anarchy--the absence of a worldwide government or universal sovereign--provides strong incentives for expansion. In such a Hobbsian world ‘all states strive to maximize their power relative to other states because only the most powerful states can guarantee their survival.” The result is expansionist policies provided that the benefits outweigh the costs. States thus have to improve their relative power “through arms buildups, unilateral diplomacy, mercantile (or even autarkic) foreign economic policies, and opportunistic expansion.” Unfortunately for the expansionist state, threatened states attempt to balance against it, leading to arms races and wars.

The theoretical implications of this theory on the Israel-Palestinian Authority (PA)-Hams triangular relationship is clear. Israel is by far the most powerful actor in the triangle, with a population exceeding 8 million, GDP of 250 billion and per capital GDP of 33 thousands per capita. The other two entities pale in comparison with a combined population of a little than over half of that, a GDP less than one fortieth the dimensions of the Israeli counterpart and a GDP per capita of 5,000 in PPP terms. To recall, the PA, created through the “Oslo” negotiation process, was supposed to be the harbinger of an Israeli-Palestinian partition. Instead, an inter-Palestinian partition took place when Hamas defeated the PA forces in Gaza and established a government of its own.

Offensive realism would predict that the Hamas and Abbas governments would join forces against Israel. Alternatively, sometimes, the threatening power is so powerful that there is no possibility of balancing against it. In that case, the political entity would prefer to bandwagon with the threatening power in the hope that he preserve part of the political kingdom compared to none. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan behaved exactly in that way when King Hussein agreed to launch an artillery barrage against Jewish Jerusalem in the opening day of the Six-Day War in order to appease Egyptian President Jamal Abdul Nasser, a dire foe in the past, though he probably felt that his move might cost him half his kingdom. Indeed, he lost Arab Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank but he might have lost his whole kingdom to Egyptian subversion had he not struck at Israel, which he knew was far more powerful than the kingdom he ruled (Walt 1985: 7).

Defensive realism holds that the international system provides incentives for expansion only under certain conditions. Under anarchy, many of the means a state uses to increase its security decrease the security of other states. This security dilemma causes states to worry about one another’s future intentions and relative power. Pairs of states may pursue purely security-seeking strategies, but inadvertently generate spirals of mutual hostility or conflict. States often, although not always, pursue expansionist policies because their
leaders mistakenly believe that aggression is the only way to make their states secure. Defensive realism predicts greater variation in internationally driven expansion and suggests that states ought to generally pursue moderate strategies as the best route to security. Under most circumstances, the stronger states in the international system should pursue military, diplomatic, and foreign economic policies that communicate restraint. Defensive realism focuses not so much on the balance of power that the expansionist state seeks to alter in its favor as much the balance of threat by states that seek to retain the status quo in the face of threatening aggressive states (Walt, 1987: 21-34).

Once again the theoretical implications for behavior within the triangle are quite transparent. Defensive realism with its focus on the balance of threat, would predict greater cooperation between Israel and the PA against Hamas, the force that expelled the PA from Gaza and whose grassroots presence in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria presents a grave threat to the PA controlled by Fatah, Hamas’ rival. Regional and international politics would only serve such a relationship. The PA is staunchly supported by the United States, the EU and regionally by the “moderate” Sunni states headed by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Hamas is more closely linked with Iran and Hizballah, who are waging a proxy war in Syria against the Saudi-led alliance.

Summarizing constructivism is a more difficult exercise. Nevertheless, some key ideas emerge from the constructivist challenge to other IR paradigms. Probably, the most important is that normative and ideational structures and identity are equally if not more important than material structures, though they are clearly more abstract than the latter. They are also pliable and subject to change through learning and discourse. Constructivists simply do not accept the realist proposition (especially the neorealist account) that states have set interests determined by their geo-strategic placement and that all other states in a similar setting would behave in the same way. States, constructivists would argue, are not reified entities but are composed of human decision makers who determine interests according to convention, values, ethics, ideology and learning (Wendt 1995: 73). Thus, Canada and Cuba are both weak neighbors of the United States. Constructivists argue that it is belief systems that explain why Canada is a traditional ally, whereas Cuba was for a long time, a sworn enemy. Realists would counter that Cuba was so weak that it could only bandwagon and its defiance was only possible due to the existence of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. Constructivist accounts are usually mobilized to support liberal-left political projects, but of course this need not always be the case. The sub-state Islamist revolt against Western hegemony is not necessarily a “progressive” project, yet it could be explained within the constructivist paradigm. So could Russia’s wars in Crimea-Ukraine and its attempts to undermine the EU and NATO.

Similarly, constructivism could reasonably predict behavior within our triangle in explaining a non-progressive phenomenon. Basically, constructivism’s account of the triangular relationship would predict no cooperation between the three sides given the differences or even antagonisms between the three sides. Israel as a Zionist state, self-identified as the State of the Jewish people that is both Jewish and democratic, is anathema to most Arabs. While most of its Jewish citizens fervently believe the almost
miraculous rebirth of the Jewish people from the ashes of the Holocaust to the formation of a sovereign state that is heir to the Jewish Kingdom of Saul, David and Solomon, the Arabs believe it is an illegitimate entity that came at the expense of the Palestinian people. The enmity between the PA and the Hamas state in Gaza is also intense as the subsequent background chapter spells out. This is an enmity well-known to any student of European history in which a national more secular entity, the PA, and a theocratic-leaning Hamas government in Gaza are at loggerhead. Identity wars consumed Europe for over a century during the Reformation. There is little reason to believe that they will be less intense in the Middle East.

The relationship between these three IR hypotheses and state formation should also be spelled out. The importance of international and regional security in influencing and even determining domestic politics, including state-minority relations, may be credited to two scholars. Otto Hintze proposed in the 1920s the seminal idea, provided the finding, and placed it in comparative perspective, and Peter Gourevitch’s widely cited article (1978) placed the insight within international relations theory. Hintze, in his “Military Organization and the Organization of the State,” claimed that the difference between the autocratic regimes characteristic of continental state-building compared to the more democratic and diffuse patterns of governance in Britain, reflected basic geo-strategic realities (Hintze 1975: 178). Whereas threatened states on the continent were usually centralized and autocratic, characterized by large standing conventional armies as a means of coping with their competitors, a more isolated Britain could handle security threats by making do with self-government and local militias. To appreciate Hintze’s seminal insights, one has only to compare Germany’s pattern of state-building (sandwiched and threatened between France and Russia) to state-building patterns in what is arguably the most favorably placed and favorably endowed state of them all in terms of war-related resources – the United States. To meet a high threshold of threat, states such as Germany and Russia tended towards autocracy. In contrast, Britain, and even more so the United States, which faced lower levels of threat than continental states, could afford the luxury of more decentralized and democratic rule. Gourevitch called this geo-strategic influence on the makings of the internal regime of the state – a second image reversed effect. The first refers to the relationship and influence between states in the international system.

Timing is also crucial in determining this pattern of autocracy compared to liberal forms of rule. Late developers economically and politically had to centralize military and economic power more than early developers simply because they were up against greater threats. Perry Anderson claims that only by generating centralized, absolutist regimes, did the Prussian and Austrian standing armies hold their own against the more modern states of Spain, France and Sweden. More liberal Poland, by contrast, did not. Not surprisingly, Poland was carved up in the course of the eighteenth century by the three powers Austria, Prussia and Russia that centralized to cope with foes in the more developed West (Gourevitch 1978).

The relationship between regime type, especially the prospects of a democratic, more liberal regime and geo-strategic threat is scarcely a nineteenth century phenomenon. Gibler and Sewell (2006) examine the role of NATO in aiding democratic transitions and
survival in the former Soviet republics since the demise of the Soviet Union. Levels of external threat determine to what extent regimes centralize, militarize, and conversely, democratize. States tend to be democratic or are likely to make the transition toward democracy when threat levels are low. By contrast, autocracies are more likely to be found in states facing higher levels of threat. NATO has been an effective guarantor of territorial sovereignty and independence in the Baltic States. NATO’s security umbrella reduced the level of threat experienced by the Baltic States and facilitated more decentralized and democratic governments. Former Soviet republics targeted by high levels of threat such as Moldova, maintained or reverted to centralized, autocratic forms of government. Naturally, external threat also impacts on how minorities are treated. The more threatened autocratic states tend to be, the more intolerant towards minorities than less-threatened state (Davis and Silver 2004; Hutchinson and Gilbert 2007; Shamir and Sagiv-Schifter 2006).

Taking the cue from these scholars, one can similarly see connections between the hypothesized relationship between the three actors and their implications on regime and state formation. Defensive realism argues that political entities are mainly concerned with balancing threat not power. The PA, rather than attempting to balance against superior Israeli power by allying with Hamas (or Hamas with the PA), might choose to ally with Israel through security cooperation against Hamas. Undergirding Israel’s extensive security cooperation with the PA, analyzed in the course of the paper, is the common threat perception Hamas poses Israel, and to an even greater extent, the PA. The PA might prefer Israel’s terms – partial statehood - to the zero-sum game conflict it perceives it is engaged with Hamas in Judea and Samaria/the West Bank since the latter’s takeover of Gaza in 2007. Were the offensive realist paradigm to prove true, one would expect the PA and the Hamas state in Gaza to be very extractive in their attempt to wrest resources from their populations to fight the Jewish state. The constructivist paradigm would suggest that the PA and Hamas governments, acting alone, would come to terms with the power disparity between each one of them and Israel and rely on international agencies to effectively subsidize the respective governments. In terms of regime orientation, one would expect greater political liberalization under the offensive realist paradigm as both entities try mobilizing all the population and be least pluralistic under the constructivist paradigm in which each entity, the PA and Hamas, try to maximize the differences in identity between them. Were the defensive realist paradigm to be robust, one would expect the PA to be more repressive because it is more threatened by Hamas than the Hamas government by Fatah members and supporters in Gaza.

The paradigms, the hypothesized behavior between members of the triangle and their regime ramifications on the PA and Hamas governments can be summarized in the following diagram:

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<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Hypothesized Relationship within the Israel-PA-Hamas Triangle</th>
<th>Hypothesized Relationship between IR paradigm and State Formation and Regime</th>
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<td>Defensive Realism</td>
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<td>Offensive Realism</td>
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<td>Constructivist Paradigm</td>
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Inter-Palestinian Partition and the emergence of the Israel-PA-Hamas Triangle

The origins of the bi-lateral conflict between Israel and the inhabitants of J&S/the West Bank and Gaza is probably public knowledge and so there is little need to repeat it. The only point worthy to clarify is that before 1967 (and possibly until the 1973 war), it was the inter-state conflict rather than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that was at center stage.

Less well-known is the story of the emergence of the inter-Palestinian partition, which came into the being in place of the inter Israel-Palestinian partition, which the Oslo peace process in the last decade of the previous century, hoped to replace. The PA that came into existence in 1994 in Gaza and Jericho, and then expanded to include the six large towns in J&S/the West Bank and their environs, was it was hoped (although never stipulated in the various Oslo process agreements) to develop into a full-scale Palestinian state after a maximum of five years of negotiations. That happy ending has yet to come to fruition, and given the inter-Palestinian partition, might never come into being for reasons beyond the scope of this paper.

That partition’s genesis can clearly be tracked to the second intifada, during which for the first time since the rebirth of the Palestinian national movement in 1964, Hamas took the lead in the production of violence against Israelis – suicide bombings within Israel and guerrilla warfare in Gaza over Fatah, the faction that since the late 1960s controlled the PLO. While Hamas’ limelight was in the ascent, the PA under Arafat and later Abbas was fast succumbing to inter-factional violence between the PA’s 12 security forces, between those forces and the popular Fatah militia called the Tanzim and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades it brought into being. Such in-group fighting not only tarnished the PA’s image, it undermined internal public security even more so that the Israeli attacks on the PA’s infrastructure in Gaza.

It was in the legislative elections in the PA, held in 2006, ten years after the first elections in the PA took place, that Hamas reaped the fruits of its internal cohesiveness and its primacy in the war against Israel. By that time, Mahmud Abbas had succeeded Arafat
after his death to the leadership of the PLO and Fatah and was elected in 2005 to become president of the PA.

He was, however, unable to reign in Fatah. The abundance of heavily armed groups further increased the probability that political rivalries over attaining a slot on the list or candidacy in a particular district would be settled by force, rather than by any civilian procedure. Irregularities in drawing up membership lists prompted acts of violence during the Fatah primaries in December 2005. Abbas, presiding over the Fatah Central Committee, acknowledged that "cheating was massive" (Fatah Tahskilu 2005). Armed Fatah groups subsequently broke into the Central Elections Commission regional offices to protest the nomination process, threatening to prevent the elections altogether. Their violence was directed against Hamas as well (Al-Kashif 2006). These assaults were conducted almost overwhelmingly by groups identified with Fatah (Abu Toameh 2006a).

Dissension and turmoil within Fatah was reflected in the decision of 74 Fatah members to defy the organization and contest the elections as independents in the districts. They easily outnumbered the 66 official candidates. Hamas tried making the most of the chaos and violence created by Fatah, by creating for its candidates an image of moderation, professionalism dedicated primarily to reform. It began with the name it chose -- the List Change and Reform (whose title significantly made no allusion in its title to religion or to the movement behind it) and the nomination of many professionals that appealed to the voters rather than merely to the members — 34 of the 62 candidates bore their professional or academic titles as teacher, Ph.D., M.D., engineer and lawyer) preceded their names — and ten were women (Qa'imah 'Hamas' 2005).

The result was stunning victory for Hamas. Hamas’ Change and Reform List won 74 seats, with Fatah trailing far behind with only 45 seats. If in the unified national list, the contest was close with Hamas securing 440,409 of the votes and 29 seats, compared to Fatah, which drew 410,554 of the votes and 28 seats in the districts, Fatah’s performance was disastrous. For Hamas’ 45 seats Fatah won only (Al-Tawjih al-Niha'i 2006)

So overwhelming a victory for the Hamas, in the face of the no less dramatic disarray in Fatah ranks, clearly reflected a radical change in the internal Palestinian balance of power. For the first time since the reemergence of the Palestinian national movement, the incumbent force consisting of the PA, Fatah and the security forces had clearly lost its hegemonic control. The strategy of counterbalancing had failed. With a Hamas government inevitable, the question remained whether Fatah and the security forces could maintain an informal yet commanding position, and regain real power.

Hamas’ decisive victory, and the subsequent creation of an exclusively Hamas-dominated government, deepened the crisis over the security forces. Previously the central concern was the ability of the security offices to deal with a rapidly deteriorating internal security situation, to the point where the Palestinian public questioned whether the forces were part of the problem rather the solution. After Fatah’s defeat, the question of whether
control of the security agencies would be in the hands of the popularly elected presidency or the newly formed government now loomed large.

For Hamas, the answer was indisputable. The security forces were to be under the control of the prime-minister, and more specifically, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. Muhammad Siyam, the Hamas minister of interior, announced the establishment of the Al-Quwwa al-Tanfidhiyya (the Executive Force) on 20 April, less than three months after the elections took place. This force was to be composed of men recruited "from all the forces composing the resistance" and reporting exclusively to the Ministry of Interior (Al-Lawh 2006). Siyam, hardly by coincidence, publicized his intention to set up the new force in a meeting with the public that took place in the ‘Umri mosque in Gaza, a bastion of Hamas power. Abbas retaliated with a Presidential decree outlawing the Executive Force. (Abu Khudayr 2006).

With the President and the Prime-minister at loggerheads over so crucial an issue as control over the security forces, it was only a matter of time before verbal disagreement over the issue degenerated into violence. As had often occurred in the past, the violence between the security forces and the newly installed government began on more peripheral turf before escalating to confrontation between the principle actors, Fatah and the Hamas. The killing of ‘Abd al-Karim al-Qoqa, the general commander of the al-Nasir Salah al-Din Brigade-- the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees--on 31 March 2006, was one the first of a string of flare-ups related to the battle over control of the SF. Al-Qoqa was killed by a bomb placed in a car fifty meters away from his home and detonated by an Israeli unmanned drone as he was walking along the street. The way he was killed contrasted sharply with the more typical means employed in assassinations in Gaza – a rocket attack from an Israeli air-force helicopter or an unmanned drone. A JI leader, Khalid Dahduh had been killed several weeks earlier in the manner (Fi Tafjir 2006). Since the killing involved more than Israeli intelligence, including the actual handwork of local collaborators judged to have purchased the car, droving it to the site and placing the bomb in it, rumors spread that SF loyal to Abbas might have had been involved.

At least five rounds of increasingly escalating violence between the PA forces in Gaza and Hamas irregulars took place from April 2006 until the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007. The downfall began in May 2007 when Hamas attacks on the PA "security rectangle", in which the headquarters of most of the security agencies and the Presidential residence were located. Hamas' military preparations were dramatically vindicated by the complete collapse of Abbas' security forces despite their quantitative edge. This entailed the complete Hamas military takeover of Gaza, after only a few days of fighting in mid-June. The defeat was so overwhelming that Martin Indyk, a former US ambassador to Israel, was convinced that Abbas consciously abandoned Gaza as part of a long-term plan to establish a provisional state in the West Bank. Indyk surmised that Abbas hoped to administer the area after the failure of the Hamas government in Gaza due to forseen international isolation of Hamas. The theory obviously floundered in the face of Abbas' repeated incompetence to rule. This incompetence was reflected in his inability to convince the United States not to hold general elections in the PA, and in failing to
prevent the Fatah renegades from contesting the elections (Indyk 2007). Abbas failed in Gaza because of his inability to lead alone, or to come up with a viable strategy. If Indyk was right, Abbas was duping the United States by receiving vast amounts of military aid to no purpose, and thereby risking the support of his only reliable ally.

**A Tale of Two Mini-States**

Whatever may be the exact reason for the collapse of PA rule in Gaza in 2007, it definitely gave birth to a new government and political entity controlled by Hamas. Both the Ramallah and Hamas governments, thereafter, resembled the authoritarian Arab regimes that the civil revolts in 2010 (and afterwards) tried to replace, with little success.

Authoritarianism has characterized the Hamas government from the top down. The cabinet, cast as the “Council of Ministers” by the official website of the Gaza government that paralleled the Abbas government site, consisted at first of five Hamas ministers from Gaza from the preceding National Unity Government, and six other appointees who replaced Hamas ministers in the former government (Hovdenak (ed.), p.11.) (The ministers replaced resided in the West Bank and could no longer fulfill their duties in Gaza.) These ministers also took charge of ministries headed by other factions, principally Fatah, who continued to hold office in the West Bank. Thus, for example, Ismail Haniyeh not only served as prime minister, but was also responsible for the two key portfolios of finance and foreign affairs. All the ministers were known Hamas members or adherents. In the absence of elections, the government in Gaza became a one-party state, just like its Abbas-led counterpart in the West Bank.

Growing authoritarian uniformity characterized the ministries as well. Hamas loyalists took over key management-level positions even in those ministries in which some of the previous employees, such as the health and education sector, continued to work. Ironically, prolonged strikes in the public sector, organized by Fatah at the Abbas government’s bidding soon after the Hamas takeover, facilitated Hamas government control over the ministries. Hamas justified hiring new staff on the grounds that continued abstention from work by existing employees threatened the collapse of critical public services. Although many employees confirmed that they were indeed allowed back to work after the strike ended, this was not the case for managers and for key administrative staff, who were systematically removed from their positions or offered other, more minor posts (Ibid.) The Hamas government also struck at the grass roots of political power by removing municipality councils controlled by Fatah and replacing them with appointed councils consisting of Hamas members.

Nowhere was Hamas’s exclusive control more pronounced than in the security sector it created. The newly-formed Ministry of Interior and Public Security became an exclusive Hamas domain. Over the course of the following seven years, the ministry hired approximately 20,000 to 30,000 security personnel, drawn almost exclusively from the ranks of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the terrorist arm of Hamas.¹ Officially, those hired were usually designated as civil police, but clearly, given the low crime rates in religious and conservative Gaza society, most were Izz ad-Din al-Qassam members who either belonged to the Internal Security Apparatus that operates against domestic
opposition, or who served in the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades in their war against Israel.

Critical to the Hamas government is the close relationship that prevails between it and the Hamas organization. The organization is the major economic beneficiary of the government’s fiscal policies, either through tunnel revenue, or from its monopoly over the import and retail sale of cigarettes, or from the al-Multazim insurance company it created to insure all government cars. According to Yezid Sayigh, in an otherwise complimentary analysis of Hamas, “the revenues from these various activities and enterprises accrue to Hamas, not to the government treasury” (Sayigh, 2011: 32).

The Hamas government’s record in human rights has also reflected its subservience to the aims of the Hamas movement rather than to the interests of the Gazan public. Only two newspapers have enjoyed completely free circulation in Gaza since June 2007: Felesteen, published by Hamas, and al-Istiqlal, published by Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Ibid, 106). Mustafa Ibrahim, a researcher for the Independent Commission for Citizens’ Rights, a human rights organization linked to the Abbas government, described the Hamas government in 2013 in the following way: “The government exercises repression and tyranny against the citizens. The police and security agencies exercise violence in various forms, from illegal detentions to restrictions on civil liberties and expression” (Kraizim, 2013).

To make matters worse, the partition of the Palestinians between two governments separated by Israeli territories, became enmeshed in the growing regional and international rivalry between the moderate Arab states allied with the United States and locally headed by Saudi Arabia, and the Iranian-Syrian axis. Just as this rivalry polarized politics in Lebanon and Iraq, so too did it deepen divisions between the Palestinians themselves.

It quickly became apparent that Mahmoud Abbas’ Palestinian Authority was firmly entrenched in the American camp. The United States and the Europeans contributed over fifty per cent of the Authority budget, trained its security forces and police, which often took place in Jordan, a state in the same coalition. Abbas maintained warm ties with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

By contrast, the Hamas external leadership, after its expulsion from Jordan in 1999, established its headquarters in Damascus, and was trained and financed by Iran as one of the proxy forces which Iran supported as part of its strategy to destroy the Jewish state. Even the support Hamas received from Qatar, the only Gulf State to maintain close relations with Hamas, stemmed from the former’s long-standing rivalry with Saudi Arabia rather than out of concern for the Palestinians.

The Robustness of the Defensive Realism Paradigm: Security Cooperation between the PA and Israel

The enmity between the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas entity was expressed in several ways. The most important was the effective security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and the Israel security services against their common enemy – the
Hamas in the West Bank. A division of labor emerged in which the Palestinian Authority uprooted the civil infrastructure of the group by day, while the Israeli security forces apprehended Hamas terrorist suspects at night. The cooperation is a 24 hour/day operation – the number and names of the suspects nabbed by both the PA security forces and the Israeli army is a daily feature in the Hamas controlled media in Gaza. The number of those arrested is staggering. In 2015, albeit in the most violent year in a decade, Israel arrested 6,900 and the PA arrested 1,659 and called in for questioning (usually former Hamas terrorists released from Israeli jails), 1558 more (Hasad).

So deep was Abbas’ fear of a Hamas takeover of Judea and Samaria that Abbas suppressed local protests against Israeli wide-scale offensives (in 2008-9 and 2012) aimed at Hamas in Gaza in retaliation against rocket launchings at Israeli civilian targets.

When the Arab spring broke out, Palestinians expressed the unrealistic hope that the presumed solidarity of the Arab street would dissipate tensions between Abbas and Hamas. To the contrary, the so-called Arab spring has only polarized Arab states and communities between the moderate state coalition and the Iranian-Assad-Shite axis and exacerbated relations between secular and fundamentalist forces.

These two regional tensions only intensified the enmity between Abbas’s Palestinian Authority and Hamas. When Muhammad Mursi won the presidential elections in Egypt in 2012 to become Egypt’s first President to belong to the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas’ parent organization, the Hamas leaders responded with victory processions in Gaza. In Ramallah, the unofficial capital of the Palestinian Authority, the news was greeted with stony silence and fear. The situation reversed itself after Minister of Defence Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, albeit with much popular support, ousted Mursi from office in July 2013 and drove the Muslim Brotherhood underground. Abbas and his entourage were now all smiles and it was time for Hamas to worry over its political future.

The close security cooperation between Israel and the PA since 2007 vindicates the robustness of the defensive realism paradigm and the primacy it gives to the balance of threats. The PA, despite its deep political differences with the Jewish state and its bitter contestation against Israel in international forums, maintains unparalleled cooperation to meet the threat of common enemy – Hamas. The number and frequency of arrests indeed attests to the breadth of support Hamas enjoys in the PA and the threat it poses to the PA.

**Rivalry, Symbiosis and Hybrid Government: The Hamas Government and the PA**

Though both governments mutually suppress the other’s forces and constituents within their areas of rule, in the financing and provisioning of public service delivery in Gaza is complicated by the tortuous relationship between the Hamas government and its Ramallah counterpart, which contained elements of rivalry, symbiosis, and dependency. The dependence of Hamas on the PA’s economic wherewithal is particularly noteworthy: for every dollar the Hamas government spent in Gaza, the Abbas government spent at least three (a total of 1.4 billion dollars in PA expenditures, compared with 300-400 million dollars for the Hamas government) (Sayigh, Serving the People, p. 3). But so is the dependence of the PA on Israel and the international community remarkable: Israel collects VAT on all imports into the PA and Gaza, which account for nearly 60 per cent.
of revenue. 30 per cent is provided by the international community making the Palestinians the second most subsidized community in the world after the inhabitants of Northern Ireland. Therefore one hybrid government nurtures another hybrid government only that the latter is the implacable enemy of the former.

The symbiotic yet highly-troubled relationship between the two governments was all too evident in the heated controversies over the obligations of the unity government formed in August 2014, and its failure to pay the salaries of employees hired by the Hamas government between 2007 and 2014. In response to a remark from former prime minister Haniyyeh, who denied that the PA spent 55 percent of its revenue in Gaza, the PA’s Ministry of Finance responded that “it spent no less than 47 percent of its budget on Gaza.” (Al-Malia Tu’aqid., 2014). Most of this was expended on the 63,000 security personnel belonging to the PA. Other funds were spent on 7,000 employees in other ministries (most of whom refrained from work), and the remainder went to released security prisoners, families of terrorists, and those with injuries and disabilities caused by Israeli-Palestinian confrontations.

According to the Ramallah-based Ministry of Finance, 70 percent of Ministry of Social Welfare expenditures, and 50 percent of spending on infrastructure and development, were devoted to Gaza. Hospitalization costs of Gaza residents in external facilities likewise came to half of the total PA expenditures in that area. The ministry also claimed that it paid NIS 55 million monthly to the Israel Electric Company for electricity provided to Gaza, and had spent 300 million dollars since 2007 underwriting the costs of Gaza’s power plant. Overall, the Ministry claimed that Gaza received favorable treatment; even though Gaza held only 39 percent of the total Palestinian population, it accounted for over 47 percent of the expenditures of the PA government. Paying the salaries of its 70,000 Gazan employees amounted to approximately 80 million dollars, almost double the total expenditures of the Hamas government (Bsisu 2014). Again, it was only due to the bitter arguments that emerged after the establishment of the unity government in August 2014, over payment of salaries to government employees hired by the Hamas government, that these basic facts (not always consistent) came to light.

These claims are severely contested by Hamas leaders. In a meeting of the Hamas-dominated Legislative Council held in April 2015, council member Yihya Musa al-’Ibadsa claimed that total expenditures of the PA in 2015 amounted to 4.2 billion dollars, of which on a proportional basis, 1.6 billion, or 140 million monthly, should have been expended in Gaza. Instead, according to his assessment, the PA spends 70–75 million dollars monthly on Gaza, with the remainder “invested in preserving the division [between Hamas and Fatah]” (al-Barlaman 2015).

A functional analysis of the impact of the takeover in each ministry tends to substantiate the reliance of the Hamas government on just those ministries with a significant social impact, an area in which the Hamas movement had supposedly been traditionally strong. According to Hovdenak, Ramallah continued to pay the salaries of most of the Gaza employees in the social affairs, health, and education ministries (Hovdenak, 2010: 18).
Failure of Palestinian Unity Government and the Robustness of Defensive Realism

Unity, since the heyday of Egyptian leader Gamal Abd al-Nasser, has been a very popular word in the politics of the Arab Middle East. Like many political buzz words, it is used so often because unity in Arab politics has been all too rare. Despite all the pan-Arab unity rhetoric of the past, only one act of unity in the modern Arab Middle East has ever succeeded - the unification of Yemen in 1990 - and even this achievement is very much in doubt today as more and more Arab states, including Yemen, are facing disintegration or partition rather than unity.

Palestinians have hardly been more successful in achieving unity than their fellow Arabs. Their latest exercise in unity, the recent establishment of a unity government between Hamas and Fatah, is likely to be no exception to the historical rule.

To recall, the unity government between the Palestinian Authority in Judea and Samaria/the West Bank headed by Mahmoud Abbas, and the Hamas government, which controls the tiny territory of Gaza, purports to be the first of many moves that will bring to an end the bitter and violent inter-Palestinian partition that occurred in the summer of 2007. At the time, Hamas Izz al-Din al-Qassam brigades chased away the Palestinian Authority’s security forces from Gaza, brutally suppressed Fatah members, and proceeded to establish theocratic rule over its million and one-quarter inhabitants.

Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, and the creation of a parallel government that was at odds with its rival, the Palestinian Authority, was a paradoxical outcome of two processes - free and democratic elections held in 2006 and the Oslo negotiations. It was paradoxical because free elections should in theory enhance the prospects of democracy – instead, in both “statelets” one-party rule prevailed ever since unencumbered by a legislative council which ceased to exist. Both proceeded to suppress the party that ruled in the other territory.

Meanwhile the Oslo peace process not only led to a violent conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in the second intifada, but to a civil war between the Palestinians. The two sides began fighting two months after the elections took place and one month after the winners, Hamas, formed a government, which Fatah never basically accepted and proceeded to undermine.

If the rift was so deep, what after all, brought the two sides to establish a unity government of mostly technocrats and to commit the two sides to holding Presidential and parliamentary elections?

The answer in a nutshell was mutual weakness. Abbas was getting nowhere in the peace process. The gaps between the PA and Israel over the major issues was simply two wide and Abbas, 78 years old, was hardly about to take the domestic risk to bridge it. He needed domestic legitimacy.

Hamas was facing an increasingly hostile Egyptian regime that accused it of abetting fundamentalist terrorism in Egyptian Sinai and areas even closer to the Egyptian capitol.
Egypt retaliated by closing the Rafah border crossing - the lifeline for Gaza to the Arab world and beyond. Hamas was also reeling under financial pressures. Iran has lowered financial support after Hamas refrained from supporting Syrian President Assad against its Sunni opposition. Hamas hardly had a choice in leaving Syria. After all, Hamas was a Sunni fundamentalist group, the Palestinians were overwhelmingly Sunni and were thus naturally inclined against the Syrian regime, especially Hamas supporters.

But there might have been another reason for Hamas at least to enter into a bargain with the PA it so loathes. The answer might lie in the recent kidnapping of three Israeli teenage students near Jerusalem. If indeed the kidnapping was Hamas’ doings, as both Israel and the PA believe, it clearly was a violent move against Israelis, but considered no less than a stab in the back by Abbas and his PA. Abbas was furious since one of the conditions of the unity deal was Hamas’ commitment to stop terrorist attacks against Israel from territory controlled by the PA. The PA needed that commitment to prevent Hamas making a move that could lead to the freeing of Palestinian prisoners and attain much popularity at the expense of the PA.

The kidnapping is probably the death knell in the recent attempt at unity. Preceding it were other moves that showed the unity government was more show than substance. The PA continues to arrest Hamas suspects. The new government also failed to come up with the funds to pay 40,000 government employees, mostly teachers, the Hamas government hired in Gaza since 2007. Hamas retaliated by sending its police in Gaza to close banks and confiscate money machines, in order to prevent the 70,000 employees who were on the Abbas PA payroll from receiving their salaries. The stalemate lasted for seven days until Qatar committed itself to pay the Hamas employees, but they have yet to be paid.

Much thornier issues await resolution further down the line. Egypt will only open the border crossing on a regular basis if the Abbas security force will run it as stipulated in an international agreement brokered before the Hamas takeover. Hamas is understandably reluctant. Even more difficult is to come up with a unified security force, the bugbear of it all.

In short, the present unity government might yet meet the fate of dozens of other unity schemes in the Arab world. After all, the Palestinians in their state of disunity are clearly in keeping with the times. With Sunni Islamic fundamentalists at the gates of Baghdad and the partition of the Iraqi state a real possibility, Syria and Libya in civil war, a Yemen fighting for its life facing Shiite Huthi opposition in the north, rebels in the south who want to succeed and al-Qaeda everywhere, the partition of the Palestinians into two entities is a relatively peaceful and livable situation by comparison.

Conclusion

The paper shows indeed how significant the Hamas terrorist threat to both parties is and how the two sides cooperate and succeed in reducing the threat of Hamas terrorist and insurgent activity. This phenomenon is clearly at odds with what the constructivist and offensive realist paradigms would have predicted. The former would have ruled it out as a project that undermines maximizing identity and ideological differences between the PA and the Hamas government. The latter would have predicted a balance of power.
between the PA and Hamas rather than the balance of threat between Israel and the PA. After all, Israel and the PA are at loggerheads over borders. The rivalry between Hamas and the PA is over political existence. With the balance of threats as the Archimedes’ point of the relationship between Israel and the PA, and close security cooperation its manifestation, it is clear that the paradigm that best predicted this state of affairs was the defensive realist paradigm.

The relationship between the paradigms and subsequent state formation is fuzzier. Both entities are characterized by one-party rule. The PA is more autocratic, while the Hamas government in its drive to dominate the public space with Islamist values (imposing dress codes on women, gender separation, condoning attacks on churches) is more penetrative and theocratic. This could suggest the robustness of constructivism at least in the relationship between the PA and the Hamas entity. But it could also suggest that these entities, particularly, the PA is using the accentuation of identity as a means to balance the threat. It is important to note in this regard that all Hamas security forces are bearded, a clear sign of Hamas’ theocratic Islamism and similar to security forces in Iran and Hizballah, while the security forces of the PA are clean shaven (see pictures below). The value added of the defensive realist paradigm is that it accounts for the Hamas’s willingness to maintain the hybrid fiscal and bureaucratic relationship spelled out in the course of the paper, which the constructivist account does not cover. The virtue of the triangular relationship is that Israeli hegemony prevents perpetual civil war between a nationalist and more secular entity, the PA, and the theocratic Hamas government in Gaza.

Annex: Bearded and non-Bearded security forces

Bearded Hamas security force
Hamas-policetake-part-in-a-graduation-ceremony-in-Gaza-City-Dec_17-2012_Photo-REUTERS-Suhaib-Salem

Non-bearded PA security force
Above: Bearded Hizballah fighters

Non-bearded Egyptian security forces
Above: Turkish police (without beards). The question is if and when will Ardogan change this?


ii The official report assessing the PA’s needs after the 2014 summer confrontation presents a slightly different percentage of total PA expenditures allocated to Gaza: 48 per cent, three per cent of which is covered by tax revenue from Gaza residents. See
"Rebuilding Hope: The Government of Palestine’s Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee,” September 22, 2014, New York, pp. 4, 34,  