

The Strategic Logic of Hamas' Suicide Terror during the Second Intifada (DRAFT)

*"The truth is that we resist an aggression, and God Says: 'attack who attacks you in the same means, as long as there is aggression'; we will not ... surrender [as] this is rejected in Islam, this is from the legal religious side. But from **the logical, mental side** revolutions that grow against occupations continue to resist until they achieve their goals, even if after a hundred years, as in Algeria and Vietnam, where the resistance ... paid a high price for their liberation the same way we pay for our resistance for freedom. Thus the logic says that if we raise the white banners what will happen?? Will we go back to the Road Map, the Road Map is a security agreement that aims eradicating the Intifada and the resistance... So what should we return to? To negotiations? We gave it a full chance during ten whole years and it proved a failure, which led to the resistance and Intifada. Should we yield and accept the occupation? This is a humiliating and insulting and we completely reject that, therefore we can only resist, **there are no other options**" (Rantisi, September 2003, our translation, emphasis added)¹.*

*"The resistance is the real option for ending the occupation and reclaiming rights, but the way we exercise resistance and the **tactics of the resistance are not constant, they are tools used according to our interests and depend on the circumstances** surrounding the resistance...tactics and the different means used from time to time are decided upon depending on the higher interest of our movement and people, to protect Palestinians and return their usurped rights" (Haniyeh, December 2003, our translation)².*

Suicide terror was first used in the early 1990s in response to a civilian massacre but did not become an important weapon in the Palestinian resistance arsenal until March of 2001. They were employed until the end of 2005 at which point it virtually ceased.³ During this interval, 57 suicide terror bombings were carried out, causing 403 civilian deaths, 71% of the total civilians killed by the Palestinian resistance organizations and 38% of all Israeli deaths during this period. And while this tactic resulted in large numbers of fatalities, particularly civilian fatalities, it does not account for the majority of deaths or attacks against Israeli targets. Further, its use and its lethality were concentrated in a particular phase of the conflict.

Suicide attacks emerged as a central Palestinian tactic only after significant transformations in occupation policies and important changes in domestic Palestinian politics. The 1990s, a decade dominated by the Oslo peace process, represented a new period in the Palestinian conflict. The Israeli

*If not specified otherwise, all interviews in this paper were found on PIC (Palestinian information Center) website that collects interviews with Hamas leadership from different newspaper and media outlets.

¹ See Interview with Rantisi on the 1-09-2003 : <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/rantisi.htm>

² See Interview with Haniyeh on the 12-23-2003: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/haneyya3.htm>

³ These figures are from Btselem.org. See in particular

http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/Casualties_Full_Data.asp?Category=6®ion=ISRAEL and

http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/Casualties_Full_Data.asp?Category=5®ion=TER . Btselem reports that two more attacks took place after 2005, one on 4.17.06 in Tel Aviv killing seven Israelis and one on 4.2.08 in Dimona causing one Israeli fatality.

state pursued policies of separation from and isolation of Palestinians. The Oslo negotiations also produced the PA (Palestinian Authority) institutions that were responsible for internal policing and which ultimately led to political polarization in Palestine. The structural changes in Israeli policies and the transformation of the internal Palestinian political institutions all contributed to the use of suicide missions (SM). Hamas—the Islamic Resistance Movement—confronted the new realities with suicide attacks in 1994, but it deployed its suicide campaigns in earnest during the Second Intifada. In this paper we examine the strategic rational considerations that led Hamas to deploy SMs beginning in 2001.

After reviewing the dominant theories of suicide bombings and pointing out their shortcomings, this paper will present an alternative rational-strategic model of terrorism. Before doing so, however, some space will be dedicated to discussing and clarifying the assumptions that underpin the existing literature on the subject. Once this is taken care of and our case selection has been justified, the paper will develop our explanation for the use of suicide terror by Hamas during the Al-Aksa Intifada. We then proceed to carefully lay out our model, linking it to our underlying set of assumptions. Next, we offer a presentation of the institutional and political context that promoted the use of this tactic by Hamas. The final empirical section of the paper will present evidence of Hamas' strategic decision-making within this context. Relying on the public statements of the Hamas leadership during the Intifada, we show that the group's use of suicide terror, though subject to a complex array of influences and often responding to countervailing pressures, was governed by rational calculations linked to the strategic aim of weakening the occupation. Specifically, we demonstrate that suicide attacks were deployed in order to promote a resistance pole that could challenge the dominance of the Palestinian Authority and therefore generate the capacity to favorably shift the balance of forces vis-à-vis Israel. To make the most persuasive case possible for a rational-strategic use of suicide bombings, we pay close attention to a particular juncture of the Al-Aksa Intifada (2003-2004) during which the logic of the tactic can be most called into question.

Theories of Suicide Terrorism

Much of the existing literature on suicide bombings falls into two broad categories. On one side, scholars of terrorism offer non-rational theories of suicide attacks. These accounts privilege affective and non-strategic factors as the key motivations behind suicide bombings. On the other side, research on the subject proposes models that view suicide attacks as rational behavior advancing utilitarian ends.

This latter set of explanations range from accounts that conceive of rationality somewhat narrowly to those that view rationality in its full strategic dimension.

Two non-rational models of suicide bombings deserve attention. Max Abrahms' work is perhaps the most hostile to rational arguments. In 'What Terrorists Really Want' (2008) he rejects the basic proposition that groups employing suicide attacks pursue clearly defined political ends. Abrahms presents evidence of overwhelming failure, fratricidal impulses among terror groups and the eschewing of available political alternatives, to show that such groups are not guided by rational calculations for political utility. Instead, he argues that organizations deploy suicide missions to satisfy the psycho-social needs of their members as these reinforce solidarity and internal cohesion. Abrahms work reflects common interpretations that have dominated journalistic narratives and policy positions on the subject. In these accounts, suicide attacks are driven not by tactical considerations but rather by the paroxysmal impulses inherent in extremist ideologies. Resorting to suicide bombings is a natural extension of 'radical Islamist' worldviews: militant groups use these attacks as they wage *jihad* against Western civilization, while indoctrinated youth volunteer for these missions in pursuit of the prestige and benefits promised by martyrdom.

While not rejecting rationality outright, Bader Araj explains the use of suicide attacks during the Al-Aksa Intifada on similar psycho-affective grounds. In 'Harsh State Repression as a Cause of Suicide Bombings' (2008), Araj argues that groups employing this tactic are primarily driven by desires for revenge. The harsh policies of military occupation do factor into his model. However, ahead of any other rationally calculated ends, armed Palestinian groups organize suicide missions in retaliation for blows inflicted by Israeli security forces. Rather than part of a strategy against occupation, suicide bombings are narrowly conceived as a reflexive tactic by militants for reciprocating the terror that occupation forces unleash on their leaders, members and constituents.

In contrast to non-rational models of suicide bombings, some influential authors posit explanations that privilege the rationality behind the tactic. Mia Bloom, also examining the use of suicide attacks during the Al-Aksa Intifada, proposes an outbidding model whereby rival Palestinian factions deploy suicide operations as they vie for domestic political market share (2004). As public support for these attacks increased following 2000, factions used them to outbid their rivals in their efforts to gain and maintain the sympathies of Palestinians. In her work, rationality is conceived of in limited terms. Her focus on the domestic factional rivalries is instructive; however, strategic considerations in the struggle against occupation weigh far less than the more immediate drive for supremacy in the domestic political arena.

In *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005), Robert Pape goes much further and offers the most comprehensive rational-strategic explanation of suicide terrorism. Dismissing non-rational accounts, Pape argues that suicide campaigns are governed by a broad strategic logic. Simply stated, suicide attacks are effective in advancing political goals: terrorists, he contends, are motivated by the demonstrated results of logically deployed suicide attacks against foreign occupation. 'At bottom', he notes, 'suicide terrorism is a strategy for national liberation from foreign military occupation by a democratic state' (45). Pape reasons that such states are less likely to respond with devastating and indiscriminate reprisals, in part because they are restrained by electorates who, impacted by the insecurity generated by suicide attacks, will demand concessions from their leaders rather than an escalation of the conflict. Significantly, and similar to Araj, Pape pays close attention to the conditions of foreign occupation as well as the domestic political dynamics of the occupying state. In sum, his model, which situates the strategy of national liberation campaigns in relation to polities of occupying powers, goes furthest in assigning a comprehensive rationality to suicide terrorism.

None of the above described models are without problems. The non-rational frameworks can be easily dismissed. Even a cursory appreciation of conflicts where suicide terror has been employed reveals their shortcomings. In Palestine, for instance, during the second Intifada, suicide attacks were on the whole abandoned at a clearly distinguishable juncture by all Palestinian factions. Yet the desire for revenge and the need for internal solidarity and group cohesion persisted, especially when considering the ongoing attacks on resistance organizations and Palestinian civil society. Similarly, the 'Islamist' ideology of Hamas as well as the extremist worldviews of its militants remained unchanged throughout, even after suicide missions were called off. Given this constant feature of resistance groups presents the varying decisions around the deployment of terror, an intractable problem for the non-rational accounts. Likewise, criticism can be directed at Bloom's outbidding thesis: if continued suicide bombings were indeed the key to domestic political success, it is difficult to reconcile Hamas' uninterrupted surge in popularity in the Occupied Territories with its decision to end its terror campaign. Moreover, Bloom's work cannot explain Palestinians' emerging preference for this tactic at the beginning of the Second Intifada. Similarly, when Hamas determined to completely abandon this tactic, other factions momentarily persisted in their use without any increase in support resulting from this continuation—indeed, in relative terms, their popularity shrank. Retaliation and competition undoubtedly play in role in the decision to use suicide bombings, as statements by resistance leaders indicate; alone, however, they are of limited explanatory value.

Yet even Pape's rational strategic model contains weaknesses. Though it incorporates the more complex realities of occupation politics, it remains one-dimensional in its central focus on single factions with rather straightforward goals, and on narrowly measured success rates of campaigns pursuing these aims. The undeniable impact of the competition which Bloom deals with on the deployment of suicide attacks is left unexamined. In addition, Pape's model hinges critically on the very narrow criteria for achievement upon which Abrahms rejects rationality in the use of this tactic. If these liberation struggles can be shown to produce poor results, Pape's account can be called into question. In other words, if resistance groups continue to use suicide attacks even when they fail in liberating territory, then the strategic rationality he identifies can hardly be said to be at work.

This paper attempts to salvage and expand upon the main insights of Pape's rational strategic model. By adding other specifications, it will propose an expanded and more robust rational strategic model which accommodates the retaliatory and outbidding theses as secondary explanations, but subsumes them to a more dynamic account of suicide terror that incorporates domestic and regional political conditions and a more complex understanding and measurement of 'utility' and success.

Assumptions, Definitions, Case and Key Questions

Before presenting our alternative model, we wish to clear the ground of some of the ambiguities and inconsistencies that pervades the literature. After doing so, we will defend our case selection and present some of the more instructive questions it offers with respect to theorizing the rationality of suicide bombings.

First, a note on strategy, tactics, and strategic rationality is in order. Political actors pursue multiple paths of actions, the sum of which is aimed at achieving an overall objective. This global aim is denominated the strategic objective and the discrete actions taken to reach it are tactics. This strategic objective can vary in scope and breadth. Political organizations pursuing grand, national projects, such as liberation from occupation and full sovereignty, can be expected to confront a wide, uneven, and potentially incoherent set of tactics to choose from. All tactics employed in pursuit of these overall aims should be presumed strategically rational as they are calculated and adopted to advance these aims. Yet the strategic rationality of tactics must meet certain criteria. Most significantly, rationality in the decision-making process of political actors depends on the demonstrable efficacy of the chosen tactics. When tactics that prove detrimental continue to be employed, the rationality of those using it can be called into question. However, given the multifarious web of available courses of action and a built-in degree of uncertainty regarding outcomes, strategic actors may still be proceeding rationally even in the

absence of immediate results. If the decision to persist in a particular tactic, its immediate inefficacy notwithstanding, proceeds in accordance with less straightforward and countervailing strategic calculations, then rationality should not be discounted.

Strategically rational decision-making is conditioned by two interacting sets of considerations. First of all, strategic rationality operates in an arena involving other actors, particularly the main adversary on one side and allied and/or rival groups on the other. When political actors pursue strategic objectives, they must make tactical choices within a field shaped by the actions of opponents and competitors. The decisions of other actors logically influence the costs and pay-offs for specific courses of action. Secondly, within this field, political actors make decisions in accordance to their perceived capacities within given opportunity structures. Both capacities and opportunities are largely generated by the institutional contours of the arena in question. This structural configuration widens or narrows the range of viable options, increasing or decreasing the costs of different tactics. The context in which they operate may rule out certain alternatives either by eliminating the capacity to pursue them or by excessively elevating the costs incurred in their pursuit. In short, strategic decision-making is institutionally patterned: the risks and costs of courses of actions will be highly modulated by the political context. One set of circumstances will promote a given tactic while another might rule it out completely. Thus, while a given institutional context will not directly determine a tactical course, it can severely constrain the range of viable options. In particularly hostile arenas, rational political actors, given the range institutionally afforded them, will choose tactics aimed foremost at minimizing risks to their strategic objectives, the availability of those accruing immediate pay-offs having been eliminated.

Accordingly, given the complexity of national conflicts, strategically-rational resistance groups adopt courses of action that, rather than intending immediately demonstrable results, seek to enhance capacity within a longer timeframe. Strategic rationality, particularly in arenas characterized by strong and enduring power asymmetries between the principal adversaries and by rival programs which potentially undermine the position of the weaker party, requires a group to choose tactics that defend its position against further erosion. If a tactic enables the group to lay the foundation for potential advances in the distant future, and to simultaneously undercut competing strategies, it is strategically rational in spite of the absence of discernable results. If the institutional context dramatically narrows the range of available options still further, it may be rational not only to adopt tactics that defer favorable results to a distant future, but even to pursue courses of action that, while on the whole unproductive, are less so than the other existing options.

The authors cited above rely on a narrow and static notion of rationality. In their views, political actors behave rationally only to the extent that their actions plausibly and verifiably *achieve* immediate goals. The preceding discussion shows, however, that strategic rationality is a far more dynamic condition and cannot be judged in terms of narrow success rates and one-dimensional cause-effect calculations. Amid the complex conditions of occupation, chosen tactics and their results cannot be measured in isolation or in their stated narrow terms. They are assessed in relation to long-term aims to build capacity and against other available tactics including non-action, that is, the impact of discontinuing a given tactic and/or allowing other competing ones to proceed unchecked on prospects beyond the immediate timeframe. In sum, unlike a simple approach to rationality that views isolated actors motivated by the pursuit of immediate utility, strategic rationality must consider developing capacity to pursue strategic aims in the long-term and the impact of actions on allies and rivals.

Given the complexity of factors that influence decisions to deploy suicide attacks, it is useful to bear in mind that like all political phenomena, this particular form of political violence necessarily obeys a number of seemingly competing and even contradictory logics. Identifying only one or a mere subset of these, however, rarely offers an exhaustive account of suicide terror. The most salient and decisive logic must be determined, its primacy must be demonstrated, and its links to other causes elucidated.

Before doing so, the phenomenon itself must be neatly defined. In our view, the most relevant feature of suicide terror is the chosen target. What makes suicide bombings a worthwhile subject of investigation is the intent to cause non-combatant, civilian casualties, that is, the willingness to target those who are conventionally off-limits in armed conflicts. Bombings directed against military personnel, members of enemy state security apparatuses, and armed settlers fall into a separate category, irrespective of the modality of the attack.⁴ Accordingly, this paper is less concerned with who are the suicide bombers (or ‘what makes suicide bombers tick?’), than with what sociopolitical conditions promote the decision by armed groups to target civilians. Our assumption is that most if not all social realities produce individuals willing to die for a cause. The more interesting question, in contrast, concerns which cases present the structural circumstances that facilitate the decisions by groups to mobilize potential bombers. This paper thus seeks to explain suicide bombings, not suicide bombers.

⁴ Few of the analysts who privilege the ‘suicide’ element of these forms of terror seem aware of the fact that all combat scenarios require the willingness to lose one’s life. This predisposition increases dramatically among resistance cadre who are strongly committed to a national cause.

Toward this end, we will examine the use of suicide attacks specifically by Hamas during the Al-Aksa Intifada which began in the Fall of 2000 and lasted until 2006. This case was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, the choice by Palestinian resistance groups to employ suicide bombings as a central yet not exclusive tactic allows for an examination of the decision to use terror over other operations. Secondly, the case is enlightening because of the Islamic character of the organization that spearheaded its use. Significantly, however, unlike other 'extremist Islamists' receiving attention for using suicide terror, Hamas indisputably has a solid national and social base. Thirdly, the case is instructive because Hamas was not alone in employing suicide bombings; not only did its Al-Kassam brigades use it, Islamic Jihad's Al-Quds wing and Fateh's Al-Aksa Brigades also made liberal use of it. The second intifada thus allows for comparative insights when discussing why 'secular-nationalists' also championed this tactic. In fact, a majority of Palestinians consistently approved of its use in the struggle against occupation. Finally, therefore, the Al-Aksa Intifada is relevant for the conclusions it allows us to draw about the use of suicide terror in the context of colonial conflicts.

Institutional Facilitators: Asymmetry, Militarization, Competition and Civilian Targets

This paper argues that the existing politico-institutional context was highly conducive to Hamas adopting the terror strategy. Attacking civilians, particularly in conflicts like the Palestinian one, in which there are multiple actors and constituencies and in which Palestinians by all accounts face multifarious sources of hostility and scrutiny, always poses moral dilemmas. Such ethically and politically problematic decisions have justifiably preoccupied scholars of political violence.

Goodwin's hypotheses on categorical terrorism assumes an approach similar to ours, assigning primacy to the structural features in the relationships between the populations in conflict (Goodwin forthcoming). He argues that in political conflicts between distinct populations, adversaries are more likely to target enemy civilians when they are viewed as complicit. This occurs in a number of contexts, the most pertinent being when civilian populations are not only physically and socially separated, but additionally when they are perceived as sharing the interests of their national leaders and directly and freely contributing to the military prosecution of the conflict. Perceiving no avenues for winning a significant fraction of opposing civilians to their position, groups find it warranted to target opposing civilians in the hopes of undermining their morale and resolve to continue fighting. Accordingly, when at least a significant share is seen as potential allies, the forces in conflict will refrain from targeting their adversaries' non-combatants.

Colonial situations, with continual settler expansion and in which the opposing populations are linked by few if any social and economic relations, and in which the polity of the occupying power overwhelmingly supports and participates in the colonial project of political elites, are cases in which, according to Goodwin, the structural conditions encourage the use of terror against civilians by forces under occupation. Undoubtedly, the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territories presents these characteristics.

Indeed, Hamas leaders have repeatedly claimed that Israeli civilians are complicit and can thus be targeted. Rantisi, the 'hard-line' Gaza leader assassinated in 2004 was well known for pointing out that there was no such thing as innocent Israelis. In an extensive interview, politbureau chief Mishaal explained Hamas' position on the question. In Hamas' view, this is not a conventional conflict 'between two countries. The person who came from Poland and took our lands and sits on our fields may appear as a civilian but in fact he is an occupier.' He attributed the complicity of Israeli civilians to the nature of Zionist society, in which 'the reserve army amounts to three times the regular army, half of Israeli society, and from all ages, all in fact carry weapons' (source).

Significantly, however, Mishaal goes on to insist, as Hamas leaders have repeatedly done, that the Islamic resistance movement has throughout offered to keep civilians out of the conflict only to be spurned by Israel officials. This indicates that while Hamas felt it could attack Israeli civilians, it did not always determine that it must or would do so. Judging that non-combatant Israelis were complicit in the occupation vindicated decisions by Hamas, along with other resistance factions, to target them during suicide campaigns. In short, categorizing Israelis as complicit gave Hamas political and ethical cover for its decision to employ terrorism. It did not, however, automatically determine its use.

Goodwin's insights on categorical terrorism indeed clarify the conditions under which political groups grant legitimacy to terror tactics. But alone, they cannot explain the move from a judgment of legitimacy of terror against non-combatants to the actual execution of such tactics. Determining that suicide attacks are rightful recourses is a necessary pre-condition for their use. But, once this ethico-political hurdle has been addressed, rational groups must still measure the strategic merit of the tactic, which is predicated exclusively on its efficacy. As discussed above, most decisive in this respect is the assessment that suicide terror produces the best results relative to other available options. Since this depends on opportunities and capacities, efficacy is highly conditioned by the existing institutional context.

Five dominant features shape the context of the Second Intifada: a revamped form of segregated occupation, an extreme power asymmetry, a rapid escalation and militarization of the conflict, a collaborationist Palestinian leadership, and a highly competitive domestic Palestinian political arena. Taken together these conditions structured the conflict and pushed it inevitably toward forms of violent confrontation. Moreover, they helped pattern the particular forms of violence that have characterized the Second Intifada. Gordon's "From Colonization to Separation: exploring the structure of Israel's occupation" shows how Israeli highest policy decisions not only structured forms of Israeli violence; it also helps understand how these in turn shaped Palestinian forms of struggle (Gordon 2008). The article convincingly shows how different occupation structures produce logics of discipline and violence.

In explaining why the Second Intifada was far more violent and lethal than previous forms of occupation and resistance, he argues that the 'occupation's structure, rather than the decisions made by this or that politician, altered the forms of control Israel used to manage the population, rendering them much more violent in later years' (28). In the period prior to Oslo, the occupation obeyed a 'colonization principle' which involved regulation of the Palestinians via increasing material standards and partial incorporation into Israeli labor markets. However, according to Gordon, this occupation regime suffered contradictions: the large numbers of Palestinians employed in Israel offered a new generation new resources and prestige that could be translated into leverage over the traditional and more docile local leadership (33). Armed with this leverage, returning workers who were less willing to accept continued dispossession challenged traditional and collaborationist elites. Simply put, one of the pillars of the colonization regime amounted to opportunities 'for maneuver and resistance [to be] turned to counter-hegemonic purposes' which fueled the first intifada (34).

In response, 'Israel', turned to an occupation regime governed by the 'separation principle'. Conceived as a solution to the problems of occupation, the objective was to transfer all responsibilities relating to the population management to the Palestinians themselves while preserving military and security control of Palestinian territory. Israeli state power in the territories was reorganized so that expansion would continue without obligations to the occupied population, that is, without the antecedent mechanisms of accountability. Gordon convincingly argues that this 'continuation of the occupation by other means' resulted in a 'normalization' of the occupation accompanied by an abandonment of the pretense of the rule of law and the naked policing of increasingly the fragmented and ghettoized OTs. As enshrined in the Oslo agreements, it established a Palestinian Authority charged with policing the territories and ensuring Israeli security, and led to deactivating popular and civil movements that

sustained the original Intifada and repressing remaining expressions of resistance. In his view, these circumstances combined to produce a 'unique form of violence' (40): with outright closure and separation, Israel's aggression against Palestinians, their territory and their social schemes of reproduction was left unrestrained.

This particular form of occupation produced significant results. Firstly and obviously, it promoted excessive and indiscriminate violence against Palestinians. This was the case even against the spontaneous civil, non-violent mobilizations that characterized the first weeks of the second Intifada. Secondly, it strongly reduced the spaces for direct interaction between Israeli and Palestinian societies. Lastly, it instituted an autocratic national leadership enforcing a collaborationist strategy. Concomitantly, resistance groups were pushed toward certain behaviors. A repeat of a grass-roots movement relying on mass civil resistance such as the first Intifada was ruled out, as opportunities for costly disruption were effectively eliminated and as Israeli officials were freed from any restraints against massive and indiscriminate violence. If efforts to confront the occupation were to have any weight, they would have to strike militarily at the Israeli state, other points of leverage having disappeared and the anticipated costs to civil strategies having increased excessively. Further, given the overwhelming military superiority of the occupying forces, resistance groups logically set their sites on soft civilian targets. Not only were opportunities for guerrilla-type strikes severely restricted, given the asymmetry in capabilities, the only remaining plausible operations against military targets were limited in scope and political impact. For blows against the occupation to resonate, they would have to reach civilian infrastructure beyond the Green Line. Accordingly, if attacks by Palestinian factions were to have any deterrent function, targeting Israeli civilians was an attractive choice. The deterrence logic was also directed internally: any resistance strategy would be dismissed by Palestinians themselves if factions such as Hamas failed to demonstrate the capacity to impose elevated costs for Israeli aggressions.

Finally, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority under the prevailing conditions of occupation meant that resistance organizations had to confront and undermine the rival approach adopted by Fatehf. The PA's commitment to cooperating with Israel on security matters necessarily led it to enact authoritarian measures. With the escalating militarization of the conflict, domestic competition also assumed a militarized form. Other scholars' work on the triggers of the conflict support this view. In 'The Second Intifada: Background and Causes of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', Pressman shows how the Oslo agreements, by handing over security functions to the PA while not producing tangible fruits

for the Palestinians, set in motion a competitive dynamic between the Palestinian factions in which military force came to be perceived as most persuasive tool on both fronts—the fight against occupation as well as the internal struggle (Pressman 2003). Thus, while his description of the ‘cycles of insecurity’ unleashed by this escalating dynamic wrongly characterizes Israeli policies during this period, Pressman’s treatment of the relation between factionalism and militarization is instructive. In the context of Israeli separation policies and an ineffectual PA, the use of force had become the ‘default position of factions vying for popular support. ‘In the absence of democratic governance for Palestinians, being armed was the major currency of political power. One’s ability to defend one’s political strength turned, in part, on one’s ability to show or use force’ (126). In other words, given the conditions of occupation via separation, militarization gave factions an institutional platform from which to exert leverage against rivals.

This explanation of the restriction of viable options to military tactics is further developed in Hammami and Tamari’s “The Second Uprising: End or New Beginning?” (Hammami and Tamari, 2001). Written at the onset of the Al-Aksa Intifada, this article offers a more detailed account of how a military logic took hold of the Palestinian resistance from its inception. The authors are primarily concerned with the diminished role of the mass civil insurgency that characterized the first intifada and they list a number of factors that shaped the struggle that emerged in 2000, many of which correspond to the separation regime delineated by Gordon: Oslo (leading to its culminating failure, Camp David), continued annexation, territorial fragmentation, and the PA as a managing proto-state. This radical shift in occupation methods created what they refer to as a new ‘geography of the “battle front” [which] has made possible a greater militarization of the clashes’ (12). As they explain, the Israeli state’s strategic reformulation set the stage for the Palestinian resistance efforts by cornering them, both politically and physically, into direct violent clashes.

In a further elaboration of the loss of leverage experienced by Palestinians with the onset of Oslo’s separation logic, the authors explain that with the mushrooming of the PA apparatus, Palestinians have come to depend increasingly on the proto-state institutions as ‘there is now a substantial public sector employing some 150,000 persons who rely directly on the PA for their salaries’ (16). Previously, there had been a layer of Palestinians employed in Israel with autonomous resources that could fuel a civil and popular insurgency. As this capacity was lost, it was not replaced. Instead, dependence on the PA would ensure that much of the ‘resistance’ would be patterned on Oslo-derived institutions.

The Oslo process led to the demobilization and redirection of activity into ‘development’ and governance efforts devoid of active grass-roots involvement. Hammami and Tamari explain that the population’s ‘deepening alienation from political action (until the current uprising) has been one of the salient outcomes of PA rule... [Thus] the mass-mobilizational role of the political factions... has been virtually obliterated by their post-Oslo organizational and political crises, from which they have never recovered’ (17-18). In effect, the vibrant organizations that mobilized the first intifada had fused with the new PA structures, losing organizational strength and autonomy as a result of the patronage links to the new authorities. When the uprising erupted, they had lost the independent capacity to lead and support civilian protestors on the street. Indeed, the coordinating committee that was formed to direct the uprising (NIHC) was unable to provide significant leadership or protection to the street demonstrators. This helps explain the ambivalent relationship between the PA and specifically Arafat and the mobilized youth on the street. More importantly, for our purposes, it explains the virtual impossibility for the renewed insurgency to assume and sustain a popular, civil nature.

To summarize, the conditions of occupation that prevailed when the Second Intifada erupted—separation, unrestrained and asymmetrical militarization, a resulting inefficacy of and reduced ability for attacking military targets, and an escalating military competition among Palestinian factions—all encouraged the use of terror against Israeli civilians by groups promoting resistance.

Dynamics of Strategic Suicide Terrorism during the Al-Aksa Intifada

In the Palestinian conflict, the use of suicide bombings indeed followed a basic strategic logic even when such attacks fail to produce the immediate results that Pape asserts and that Abrahms refutes. Suicide attacks have been deployed to preclude consequences deemed strategically disastrous and to further a set of more broadly conceived objectives. Hamas perpetrated terror attacks (and later called them off) at various junctures as calculated responses to a complex array of influences. Fundamentally, Hamas relied on suicide bombings to favorably alter the balance of power in its struggle against Israeli occupation. More than using terror to gain immediate territorial concessions, suicide attacks were employed to gain leverage in what Hamas, as a national movement, understands as a long term struggle. For Hamas, the primary goal has been to prevent further erosion of the Palestinian position and to develop capacity for an eventual exaction of concessions.

Securing a more favorable position and developing long-term capacity was rooted in the successful establishment of a balance of terror. Hopelessly outgunned in the military arena, terror assumed

strategic qualities. While it is correct, as Pape argues, that suicide attacks are expected to provoke terror and insecurity among Israeli citizenry, it is incorrect to proceed to argue that this outcome alone is intended to extract direct concessions. During the second Intifada, Hamas and other resistance factions were under no illusions that significant portions on the electorate would pressure officials into negotiated concessions. Israel's formal democratic procedures notwithstanding, Hamas and its allies reasoned that no amount of republican oversight would restrain Israeli aggression and that on the whole Israelis would invariably support continued occupation, irrespective of tactics pursued by Palestinians. Rather than looking to win Israeli sympathy for Palestinian demands, terror was calculated to exhaust steadily the common Israeli occupation project. Terror was the lever for a gradual improvement in the Palestinian bargaining position. Domestically, terror operations were the fulcrum on which Hamas would reignite and rebuild a resistance strategy.

The cost upon Israeli society that Hamas sought was one that would run its course over an extended timeframe. Hamas understood that they would not polarize society until 'doves' prevailed over 'hawks'. Operating in an expansionist colonial context, where the majority of Israelis consistently favored harsh military measures and reoccupation, Hamas judged that the vast majority of sections of the Israeli polity supported and even carried out the expansionist project. Accordingly, the bombings were designed to exhaust one government after another, all of which Hamas correctly assumed aimed to extend the occupation, until finally, civilians and officials alike, having lost the will to endure, would reluctantly decide to sacrifice their shared project and negotiate an end to the occupation. Terror was the mechanism that would enhance Palestinian national ambitions and undermine the colonial enterprise.

Nor were the suicide campaigns simply intended to derail the negotiations. To reiterate, the objective was to redraw the balance of forces so that an auspicious settlement could be achieved. Yet for any of these plans to advance and bear fruit, Hamas was first concerned with relaunching, preserving, and strengthening the resistance strategy. In so doing, Hamas was operating in competition with the other strategy that leading sections of the national authority has chosen—negotiations. As Hamas felt that the Oslo model of negotiations was self-defeating and actually eroded the capacity for attaining national rights, its objective was to forge a new strategic path that could overrun the logic of the detrimental peace talks. In this effort, Hamas deployed carefully calculated suicide attacks intended to project more forcefully the resistance option and to galvanize decisive public support for this option. This was facilitated by the eruption of the Intifada and the new alignment of factions favoring armed struggle. In short, Hamas' central effort was to establish a hegemonic program of resistance. Hence, during crucial

years of the second Intifada it carried out suicide operations measured to firmly establish this new logic of struggle and to conclusively supplant the capitulationist Oslo negotiations.

This endeavor, indispensable for the fundamental aim of positively altering the balance of national forces, took on primordial strategic import. In setting up a robust pole of resistance, Hamas was forced to contend with pressures coming from its domestic rivals as well as from its constituents and the 'Palestinian street'. The campaign to move beyond the Oslo logic and the pressure emanating from the public meant that Hamas' use of suicide bombings was indeed influenced by competitive drives and calls for retaliation, as other authors have argued. However, these factors which admittedly weighed in the decision to deploy suicide bombings followed a logic which Bloom and Araj have mispecified.

Competition with Fateh went far beyond and deeper than simply outbidding it for domestic political 'market share'. Market share was not the ultimate objective, though it was a necessary one. Hamas and others competed with the more conservative and powerful sectors of Fateh, as mentioned above, precisely to set up a resistance option which could become the hegemonic approach in the national struggle against occupation. The central aim was to legitimize resistance and marginalize those favoring Oslo style talks. Without broad popular support, Hamas could not present itself as the lead option for superseding the damaging peace talks. In pursuit of this leadership role, and acutely in tune with the popular Palestinian mood, Hamas carried out terror attacks when it felt they would further galvanize public backing of the resistance option. The dynamic was far more complex than the one-dimensional, linear logic described by Bloom. Depending on conditions on the ground and on responses from Israel, its immediate adversary, domestic rivals and regional actors, the deployment of terror could turn against Hamas and begin to erode support for the very strategy it was promoting. While at some junctures, suicide attacks enhanced the resistance option, at others, it weakened it. When their deployment helped develop and strengthen a hegemonic resistance pole, Hamas multiplied attacks. When, in the context of the very competition with the PA, they polarized the Palestinian polity, thereby threatening the very national fabric upon a new resistance option was to be built, Hamas, appreciating the overriding dangers to national unity, quite rationally determined to abandon the balance of terror strategy.

A similar point can be made with respect to retaliation. As the resistance option was growing in popularity and perceived viability, and in light of Hamas' strategic need to develop a tactic which might serve a deterrence function, Hamas felt bound by calls for retaliation from its members and supporters. In so doing, Hamas was not simply lashing out against Israel for the mere sake of revenge. More

accurately, in heeding retaliatory pressure from its constituents, Hamas was securing the public support that the resistance option, besieged by domestic rivals, required. Failure to respond would have far worse consequences than the missed opportunity to avenge Palestinian fatalities. More significantly, it would undermine the organization's legitimacy and call into question its leadership position in the renewed resistance strategy. However, just as suicide terror could, depending on the immediate circumstances, begin to undercut the position Hamas sought to establish vis-à-vis other factions, it could also begin to incur excessively elevated costs to constituents due to reprisals taken by Israel. If these costs grew too much, continued deployment of terror risked exhausting public support, in spite of immediate pressure for retaliation. Retaliation alone, then, was not a driver of suicide attacks. Suicide attacks were undertaken when and only when the retaliatory function they shored up the necessary public faith in Hamas as a leader of the resistance. When the civilian toll of the reprisals they provoked outweighed the potential for popular support they promised, Hamas sued them sparingly and immediately thereafter and logically called off the suicide campaigns.

Finally, the decisions to change course were conditioned by the opening of possibilities for alternative strategies. High costs in terms of deterioration of civil society and factional polarization could not induce the abandonment of suicide bombings without other options becoming available. For Hamas these were presented with the convergence of multiple factors. Firstly, as the costs of the terror route began to overtake its gains, Hamas began to gauge that the strategy of resistance had firmly and successfully been established. Hamas' prestige had grown sufficiently and the PA's collaboration had been conclusively discredited. Yet given its control of state apparatuses and its enjoyment of external support, the PA did not disintegrate. Continued use of suicide attacks would at some point serve to dangerously polarize Palestinian society. Before suicide operations produced outright civil war, Hamas decided to cash in on its success and on the prevailing disaffection with the PA, and redeem it in the form of an institutionalized position within the national movement and polity. This option was facilitated by the second factor: Sharon's decision to withdraw from Gaza, for which, after initial hesitation, Hamas could claim credit and point to as a direct result of the suicide attacks.

Thirdly and simultaneously, the internal institutional context improved dramatically. Just as Hamas could claim credit for the withdrawal from Gaza, juxtaposing it to the PA's sterile policy of cooperation, an opportunity to challenge Fateh's hold on state institutions presented itself. When the PA was forced to hold a second round of elections, Hamas was poised to make significant electoral inroads. The resistance movement found itself in a position to use the very 'rules of the game' sanctioned by its rivals

to encroach upon Fateh's control of the resources which allowed it to maintain its collaborationist policies despite their unpopularity. Hamas' capacity, it judged, could now be enhanced by switching to tactics which would continue to strengthen its position yet halt the logic of polarization which had taken hold of its rivalry with Fateh. After early municipal elections in which tested its strength, Hamas decided to divert its efforts toward this new arena and abandon terror once and for all.

Lastly, the regional and international arena became increasingly decisive in Hamas' decision-making. Whereas with the eruption of the Intifada the normally negative pressures from regional actors against the resistance option were attenuated, following US success in aligning Arab regimes behind its 'War on Terror', and especially after the invasion of Iraq, Hamas could no longer escape the renewed and intensified pressures from regional players to abandon its strategy. While Hamas' resistance strategy was in the ascent domestically, it could insulate itself against these pressures. However, once the rivalry with Fateh reached a breaking point, regional pressures were felt in earnest. At this point, Hamas had already won official endorsement as legitimate national representatives among regional powers. When the domestic political dynamic could no longer shield it from mounting pressures, and before it could lose the mounting international recognition it had garnered, Hamas logically began responding to regional pressure.

Global objectives of suicide missions

Hamas started the use of suicide missions in 1994 in response to Baruch Goldstein's massacre in Hebron and intermittingly deployed SMs throughout the 90s. It was only until the eruption of the second Intifada that Hamas went forward with its suicide campaign in earnest. Many have argued that Hamas took the role of a spoiler of the Oslo process, resorting to simple explanations such as Hamas' disinterest in peace and resort to terror. Hamas leaders state clearly, however, that they were against the Oslo accord exactly because it would not bring independence and peace to Palestinians.

Hamas's global objective from the SM campaign was to enhance Hamas' capacity for resistance to change the balance of forces between Israel and the Palestinians. By changing the balance of forces Palestinians would be able to avoid negotiating from a weak position and in turn avoid jeopardizing

Palestinian national interest for liberation. Hamas went about enhancing its capacity for resistance first by using SMs as a deterrence force. Accordingly, killing Palestinian civilians was met by the killing of Israeli civilians to make Israelis share the costs of the occupation- a balance of terror strategy. Second, Hamas hoped to turn this resistance strategy into a hegemonic national Palestinian agenda. The use of SMs was supposed to fortify the resistance pole within Palestinian society to enable Palestinians to confront Israelis in the long run.

In an interview on 7 December 2003, Mishaal, the head of Hamas' political bureau, explained that Hamas had chosen SMs because they function as an ideal deterrence force within a context of limited available options for resistance and limited possibilities for other military operations. He said the use of SMs was a natural development in response to Israeli aggression against civilians, and to increase the power of Palestinians with respect to Israel. As Israel developed its aggressiveness and use of force against Palestinians, Palestinians in turn changed their weapons. They started with the stone and now have SMs, he said. He further stated that he is morally unhappy with the killing of children, but had the martyrs been able to reach Sharon and his army leaders, they would not have targeted civilians. The overall purpose of using SMs was to damage Israel's security agenda to force them to stop attacking civilians and contribute to ending the occupation.⁵

Thus, Hamas' choice of SMs as a resistance tactic was constrained by limited options in Hamas' institutional arena and the level of Israeli militarization. The overall purpose of SMs went beyond the interest in retaliation. SMs had clear strategic value in Hamas' logic, to increase Hamas' level of deterrence against Israeli aggression, and to force Israelis to share the costs of the occupation. Again, they ultimately believed that the use of SMs would strengthen their position vis-à-vis the occupation. Given its structural constraints, Hamas chose the tactic of suicide violence because it believed that the missions' lethal nature and terrorizing impact could deter Israeli aggression. Rantisi explained the importance of suicide missions. He said: "halting suicide missions is dangerous for the overall future of the Palestinian question because the enemy will be released from the biggest pressure and terrorizing power; therefore, suicide missions will continue"⁶ (our translation).

⁵ See Interview with Mishaal on PIC website: http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/khalied_meshaal.htm

⁶ See interview with Rantisi on the 30th of March, 2003: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/rantisi%281%29.htm>

We argue that Hamas' interest in improving its capacity for resistance and deterrence force by using SMs intended to counter the 'peace process' path pursued by rival Palestinian actors since the 1990s. In order to avoid negotiating from a weak position and avoid further erosion of Palestinian national rights.

On 8 June 2003 Rafat Nasif, Hamas' representative in Tulkarem (West bank), stated this concern clearly. He explained why Hamas was opposed to the Road Map and committed to the resistance: "All the main issues for negotiations were delayed until the last stage of negotiations, and by that time Palestinians would have been stripped from all their **sources of power**, and the weapons of resistance have been taken away from them"⁷ (our translation, emphasis added).

In 2005 Mishaal even went further and made a very clear statement indicating that Hamas was not opposed to negotiations, and that peace should be made when Palestinians are better positioned to negotiate. He said "without a balance of power, you can't make an honorable peace."⁸

In a more recent interview, Mishaal explained the strategic logic behind the need to enhance Hamas' capacity before pursuing negotiations: "in the science of strategies and conflict management, negotiations are an extension of war, and it is a way of differently managing a war. What you gain on the negotiation table is a function of your condition on the ground, a product of the balance of forces in the field. If you were defeated in the field, you will no doubt be defeated at negotiations, and if the war needs a balance of forces, then negotiations also need a balance of forces, and peace needs balance of forces, because peace is not made between a weak and a strong party. Otherwise it is capitulation..."⁹(our translation).

Significantly, Hamas was keen on turning its counter resistance strategy into a hegemonic national agenda. In 1999 Abu Shanab explained Hamas' strategy to counter the "peace process' which, according to his understanding, did not satisfy Palestinian ambitions. He said Hamas wants "to be the vanguard that carries the banner of the Palestinian rights until the Palestinian people retrieve their legitimate national rights. Therefore the resistance will continue under all conditions, even if there is a final solution"¹⁰. From Hamas' point of view the hegemonic national agenda was necessary because Hamas

⁷ See interview: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/nasef.htm>

⁸ See Amira Howeid's piece on Mishaal, "Khaled Meshal: Warrior at rest" in Al- Ahram weekly on the 7-13- April, 2005: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/735/re1.htm>

⁹ See Interview with Mishaal on the 7-21-2010: <http://www.palestine-info.info/ar/default.aspx?xyz=U6Qq7k%2bcOd87MDI46m9rUxJEpMO%2bi1s7cR3dbPZuMapmnHYXgDlpSoWjuTNx d6xToCxtHWmoJYd%2bvcBf9vuglGwODbJYP6L5HwLpa6km56d9d7Y%2bID9QVaxggRLXByF8V3J4So%2btqGI%3d>

¹⁰ See Karmon Ely In 'Middle East Review Of International Affairs'. Vol. 4, No. 1 (March, 2000: 73).

was concerned about the consequences intrinsic in an unbalanced negotiation path, while abandoning the resistance.

Hamas' strategic logic behind the use of SMs, however, was not forcefully put forward by the movement until the eruption of the second Intifada. As we will see in the following sections, Hamas' decisions to deploy SMs and halt the campaign depended on the reading of internal Palestinian scene, and regional context. When the costs of continuing with the suicide campaign put national Palestinian interests at risk, Hamas restrict its use of suicide missions. But when Hamas believed that the campaign would advance the national struggle and was in line with Palestinian popular opinion, Hamas went forward with the campaign.

In the following three sections we will present the rationale behind the deployment of suicide missions in three different stages of the second Intifada. Stage one will explain Hamas' strategic considerations for initiating the use of SMs at the beginning of the Intifada where the benefits of the SM campaign outweighed the costs. At stage two in mid 2003, Hamas started to reconsider the use of SMs and the costs started to outweigh the benefit but it was still rational to deploy SMs. Finally, in 2005 Hamas decided to halt the SM campaign when the costs completely outweighed the benefits and at the same time other possibilities for action presented themselves.

The initiation of the suicide campaign in the second Intifada:

By 2000 Palestinians realized that the peace process had failed and that Israelis had no interest in either stopping the settlements, which grew bigger and bigger during Oslo, or in arriving at a final settlement with the Palestinians that would allow for the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state. We argue that Hamas saw the eruption of the second Intifada as a pivotal moment for a shift in strategy and an opportunity to pursue the armed struggle path, as the failings of negotiations became apparent to all. As the Intifada erupted the conditions were favorable for establishing a resistance pole through SMs. SMs at this stage meant to change the balance of forces to avoid the negotiation path that was seen by Hamas and other Palestinian groups as harming Palestinian national interests. The second Intifada served as an appropriate moment for adopting and expanding the resistance path especially because in opposition to the preceding decade of the 90s, both the different political and resistance factions, and the Palestinian popular sentiment seemed united in favor the resistance.

In an interview to the Lebanese Journal Al- Mostakbl on 14th of March 2001, Abraham Goshi, the official spokesperson of Hamas, illuminated the above points. He said that Palestinians tried the negotiation

path, and now it was time to give a chance to the route of resistance. Goshi was asked whether the Palestinian resistance and the use of SMs would be able to counter Sharon's plans of dividing the West Bank and Gaza into 60 different cantons to control Palestinians. His response was that if the resistance is capable of inflicting harm on Israelis by making them incur losses, just like the resistance did in Lebanon, then Palestinians can force the Israelis to retreat from their plans and end the occupation. Goshi stated, however, that only by halting PA military coordination with Israel and pursuing the resistance path in a Palestinian unified front could success be insured.¹¹ It seems like in the early years of the second Intifada Hamas officials might have been thinking of success in Pape's terms of territorial concessions. We will see shortly, however, that as the Intifada advances this logic becomes more complex.

The ability of Hamas to join forces with other resistance factions at the beginning of the second Intifada strengthened its resistance pole and weakened the PA factions that rejected the resistance. Dr Musa Abu Marzoq, the vice-president of Hamas' political bureau, was asked in an interview on 19 November 2002 about intra Palestinian talks and whether Hamas was being pressured to stop SMs. He explained that the talks mentioned the use of SMs but did not deal with the issue thoroughly, because most resistance factions, including Fateh members, were behind the resistance and supported the use of SMs inside the Green line.¹² (See graph 1 that shows the number of SMs deployed by the different organization).

Even more telling about the unified Palestinian front in favor of the resistance is a recent revelation by Zahar who declared on 29 September 2010, when discussing and criticizing the conduct of the PA in the current negotiations with Israel, that Arafat had asked Hamas to deploy suicide missions inside the Green line when the negotiations were stalling¹³.

Hamas, however, could not have gone forward with SMs without Palestinian popular support¹⁴. Palestinians were frustrated by the failure of Camp David and the Oslo 'peace process,' which had increased their suffering, restrained their freedom of movement, and deteriorated their economic conditions. Hamas was interested in winning over Palestinian support for the resistance and creating a

¹¹ See the interview with Goshi: http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/statements/interviews/14_3_ghosheh.htm

¹² See interview: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/hane.htm>

¹³ See Zahar's declaration on the 29 of September 2010 on Daralhayat website: <http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/185971>

¹⁴ Since the early Intifada and until 2002 polls showed that Palestinians were firmly with the resistance see Jeroen Gunning, 2009: 227.

resistance pole within Palestinian society. And Hamas went forward with its program when it gained this support. Accordingly, retaliation to Israeli attacks and responsiveness to Palestinian popular sentiment factored into Hamas' strategic agenda because they harnessed popular support for the resistance. But Hamas was keen on turning this into a hegemonic national strategy by which all Palestinian factions pursued this route. Hamas leaders thus argued frequently that competition over the resistance is positive and only enhances the resistance¹⁵. For Hamas then, the competition between the different resistance groups over the deployment of SMs enhances the Palestinian national interests and not the sectarian party interests.

Thus, the early years of the Intifada provided an opening for Hamas to pursue their resistance path and employ suicide missions mainly because the moment was appropriate for forging a hegemonic front in favor of the resistance that gained the support of ordinary Palestinians, different political factions and resistant groups.

Moreover, internal Palestinian unity immunized resistance actors from unfriendly Arab regime influences and pressures. During the early years of the Oslo "peace process," Hamas was a marginal political force, but it slowly gained popular support among Palestinians in the occupied territories and in the Arab world. In the late 1990s Hamas became a significant political player, and its political bureau had official headquarters in Jordan¹⁶. Simultaneously, however, American pressure on Arab regimes to curtail the power of Islamic resistance movements was growing. In 1999 with the new king (Abdullah II the son of Hussein) in Office, Jordan complied with US demands to close Hamas's offices in Jordan and expelled its leadership to other Arab regimes. Hamas managed to find refuge in other Arab countries where they pursued their political activism and opened legitimate offices.¹⁷

The eruption of the second Intifada and the initiation of resistance by Al- Aksa Brigades, the armed wing of Fateh, was a pivotal moment for Hamas, which could now confidently pursue the path of resistance with other Palestinian groups in spite of regional pressures. This regional pressure did not change dramatically with the eruption of the second Intifada, but Hamas was gaining power internally by forging a united front in favor of the resistance. Regional players therefore had to acknowledge the

¹⁵ See interview with Mishaal on the 3-12-2003 with Al- Manar tv channel: http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/mashal_manar.htm

¹⁶ Information on the growing political relevance of Hamas could be found in Tamimi (2007).

¹⁷ See both Tamimi(2007) and Andoni's(2000) article 'King Abdallah : In His Father's Footsteps?'

establishment of a resistance pole and Hamas' increasing power. In addition, Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in response to Hezbollah's resistance strengthened, for a while, the path of resistance.

Significantly, Hamas continued to use SMs when liberating lands was not on the horizon and Palestinians continued to suffer from Israeli attacks. To make things worse the SM campaign intensified Palestinian internal divisions and polarization. This might lead one to question the efficacy of the SM campaign. We therefore show how a dynamic strategic model explained Hamas' rationality behind continuing the SM campaign in the third and fourth years of the Intifada.

The Puzzling years, 2003-04:

Between 2003-2004, Israeli government and society became increasingly intransigent and Palestinians were still paying a high human cost (see graphs 2, 3). The SM campaign that started in 2001 did not halt Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians or lead to Israeli concessions. Nevertheless, Hamas continued with its use of SMs, a strategy that might lead one to question the efficacy of the SM campaign. But by taking a closer look at Hamas' strategic decisions to intermittently deploy SMs during these two years, a more dynamic strategic model in Hamas' conduct becomes apparent. At this stage Hamas had to balance two different dynamics. They were still interested in improving the balance of power by preserving the resistance pole they established through the deployment of SMs. This became especially important because of the growing power of the PA faction that rejected armed resistance. At the same time they wanted to avoid the process by which the deployment of SMs increased the risks for internal polarization and strife. First, to understand Hamas's dynamic strategic rationality we have to understand Hamas' logic of Balance of power and Success. Second we have to look at the impact of changes in internal Palestinian politics and in the role played by regional actors.

Balance of power and success

If we restrict our definition of success to Pape's measures of rates of success of liberating lands, Hamas, as Abrahms argues, is acting irrationally. For Hamas, however, success is evaluated differently, given the unequal power relations and the unfavorable political circumstances. The absence of immediate concrete results and deferring of favorable results to a distant future should not undermine the strategic rationality of the campaign. We argue that under certain circumstances strategic rationality should allow for what appear to be narrow aims, such as the survival of the struggle, to override the larger strategic goals of liberating lands and ending the occupation.

Two strands of strategic thinking appear in Hamas' longer timeframe. First, Hamas' ability to make Israeli civilians share the costs of the occupation was considered a point of success for the movement. Repeated successes in breaching Israeli security would continue to enhance the resistance capacity. Second, Hamas was interested in preserving the resistance pole and gaining more power internally to set itself up for future confrontations with Israel.

In an interview with Mishaal on 12 March 2003, he explained why suicide missions are successful:

the philosophy of the resistance, brother Omar, is not necessarily to inflict the biggest number of deaths, but the philosophy is to crack the security of this entity and to exhaust the enemy in a long term struggle, so that in the end this enemy will not be able to bear this high burden of the occupation, and it will force it to leave and to withdraw from our lands and holy places. This is the philosophy, and as long as the resistance is surviving and continuing to protect our people, and it is able to update its methods and tools, then it is in good condition, and the enemy is in fear. One rocket, what did it do? It undermined the security agenda of Israel in spite of its local production and limited performance. It is symbol of a will of a nation that defeats the mentality and morality of the Zionists¹⁸ (our translation).

Thus, under the current asymmetrical power relations- a factor ignored by Abrahms when evaluating success- the fact that Israelis were afraid and were discussing the costs of suicide missions was considered a victory for Hamas and for Palestinians. Hamas' understanding of how the balance of terror strategy works is not straightforward. They do not believe that SMs will directly lead to concessions. The deterrence strategy was fortified by continuous successes of breaching Israeli security and making Israelis share the costs of the occupation.

This understanding of success rests on the long term perception of the struggle. In an interview with Yassin on 15 December 2002, he said: "our future outlook in Hamas is that we are confronting a long and difficult struggle with an enemy that has all of the necessary power, and is supported by the international brute powers, and this struggle needs a lot of patience and sympathy and social solidarity, and our only option is to continue resisting and Jihad, until victory is achieved, because giving up means defeat and returning back to point zero. [...] We have to continue with Jihad and resistance until the enemy surrenders and gives back to our people their rights according to God's will"¹⁹ (our translation). For Yassin then, "point zero" is when the resistance pole did not exist and the capitulation logic of Oslo advanced unimpeded. And thus, the continuous deployment of SMs allowed Hamas to preserve the resistance pole that they had already built. And ultimately for Hamas, the survival of the resistance was in itself a sign of success.

¹⁸ See the transcripts of the interview on Al-Manar (Hizballah's official TV channel): http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/mashal_manar.htm

¹⁹ See interview on the 12-15-2002: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/yaseen.htm>

In another interview with Yassin on 26 September 2003 he further stressed the idea of the long term nature of the struggle and the continuation of the intifada as a sign of success. Yassin was asked about the achievements of the movement, and his answer was that Palestinians will not be able to liberate lands in a year or two and that the continuation of the resistance is an achievement in itself²⁰.

The long term anticipation of liberating lands is made vivid in Hamas's response to Sharon's intentions to withdraw from Gaza. Although Israeli withdrawal was considered a victory of the resistance, and Hamas did attribute it to the resistance in its aftermath, Hamas did not anticipate the withdrawal, nor did they strategize to achieve it. In a speech by Muhammad Nazal, a member of Hamas's political bureau, on 5 April 2004 in Beirut, he said: "Sharon's declaration of his plan to withdraw from Gaza is a new shirk and guile added to his long list of guiles and cunning, and is an attempt to convolute the rights of Palestinian people by putting forward initiatives that aim at ending the struggle and killing the ember of the resistance. But we are aware of Sharon's tricks and games, and we will face them with the necessary means. And in the case of the withdrawal from Gaza, we will deal with it as a victory for the resistance that thickened the occupation with wounds"²¹ (our translation).

In opposition to Pape's thesis, Hamas clearly did not anticipate the withdrawal or plan it. Instead, Hamas's continuation of SMs during the third and fourth year of the Intifada relates partly to its understanding of the long term nature of the struggle and of how it perceives success given its disadvantaged position. Hamas continued its resistance and use of SMs to attempt to change the balance of power between Israelis and Palestinians in the long run.

Hamas' strategizing within a longer timeframe is also evident in Hamas' position on internal Israeli elections. Again contra Pape's propositions, Hamas had no illusions of impacting the choices of the Israeli electorate to force their officials into negotiated concessions. Hamas treated the different Israeli governments alike and understood that balance of power is necessary regardless of the Israeli government in power. On 9 January 2003, Rantisi rejected the claims that Hamas' military operations led to the election of Sharon and explained that these claims are presented only in order to stop the resistance. And when asked how Hamas would respond to the election of Sharon, he said: "We in the Hamas movement deal with an occupation on our lands and do not deal with individuals such as Sharon,

²⁰ See interview on the 9-26-2003: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/yaseeen1.htm>

²¹ See link for the speech: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/2004/nazal.htm>. Also see Interview with Mishaal with Kodes press on the 2-19-2004 who makes a similar arguments about the dangers in Sharon's plans: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/mesh3al.htm>

Barak, Shimon Peres or Mitzna and others. As long as there is occupation there will be resistance. Escalation on behalf of the Zionist enemy will be met with Palestinian escalation. This is the equation we believe in, and it is the only equation that serves the higher interests of the Palestinian people”²²(our translation). For Rantisi, Zionist escalation alludes to the fact that all Israelis abide by the occupation strategy of trying to crush Palestinians. This, Rantisi explains, will be met by escalation, i.e. continuing resistance regardless of who is in power in Israel.

Nevertheless, Hamas responded to political changes on the ground and reevaluated its strategic decision to deploy SMs when the costs of using suicide missions jeopardized Palestinian national interests (risking internal strife and alienating regional allies). At this time Hamas started to conceive of capacity in different terms and considered the path of political participation. Eventually, when alternative paths presented themselves and Hamas considered participating in political governance, Hamas officials took the decision to stop using SMs.

Internal Palestinian actors, Palestinian public opinion and external political context:

Most scholars fail to take into account the internal and external political contexts within which Hamas operates. These scholars have a one dimensional view of strategic rationality. Also Pape focuses on the strategies of single factions. We argue that Hamas’ decision to intermittingly continue using SMs throughout 2003 and 2004 was partly related to strategically weighing the costs of action and inaction, while accounting for the role of Israel and other Palestinian actors. The biggest challenge for Hamas at this stage was that the deployment of SMs had contradictory impacts that Hamas needed to balance. The resistance strategy was still giving Hamas an advantage in fortifying the resistance path and avoiding negotiations, especially because of the growing power of the PA faction that wanted to decimate the resistance. However, at the same time the costs involved in continuing with the resistance were increasing, as the Palestinian political scene became increasingly polarized. Simultaneously, Hamas had to respond to external pressures from neighboring Arab regimes.

Contrary to Bloom’s thesis, Hamas’ competition with some Fateh and PA members went far beyond the interest in gaining domestic and political ‘market shares’. Indeed, Hamas’ competition with the PA intended to galvanize Palestinian public support for the resistance but it was in order to forge a hegemonic resistant national agenda. This logic is evident in negotiations around the truce.

²² See Interview with Rantisi: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/rantisi.htm>

As a result of its growing popularity and political weight, Hamas gained political recognition both from the Arab world, represented by Egypt, and by the PA. And in mid November 2002, Hamas was invited to participate in the first intra-Palestinian talks in Cairo to discuss the relations between the PA and Hamas. Before long the PA and Arab leaders, led by Egypt, started using the Cairo Talks to exert pressure on Hamas to halt the use of SMs in response to Israeli demands. Hamas agreed to a conditional three month truce, on 29 June 2003, by which it stopped deploying SMs inside the Green Line on the condition that Israel stop attacking civilians. It is important to note that all Palestinian factions remained committed to the truce in spite of continuous Israeli violations, which indicates Hamas' serious commitment to the truce²³. The main drive for the truce was to avoid internal Palestinian strife, a factor that influenced Hamas's strategic decisions throughout the 90s and early second Intifada. But while Palestinian unity encouraged Hamas to take the resistance path and employ SMs in the beginning of the second Intifada, the danger of internal strife restrained Hamas' SM campaign in mid 2003.

The fact that Hamas agreed to a temporary military truce in mid 2003 shows that the use of SMs became more problematic for the movement. At this stage Hamas had to deal with two countervailing pressures. On the one hand, it was still strategically rational for the movement to continue its SM campaign to increase the balance of forces between Israel and the Palestinians, galvanize Palestinian public support for the resistance, and avoid negotiations. On the other hand, SMs became a liability that could lead to civil war and risk Palestinian national interests. When the civilian toll and the risk of internal strife outweighed the potential for popular support and jeopardized national interests, Hamas called off its SM campaign.

In an interview with Mishaal on 25 August 2003 he explained that Hamas agreed to a three month truce because of the reading of the specific period, and the truce's main purpose was to alleviate pressure from Palestinians and to avoid internal Palestinian strife and civil war²⁴.

This fear was also expressed regularly by Hamas' internal leadership. On 8 June 2003, Rafat Nasif expressed fear of civil war when he discussed the negotiations: "the civil war would have been ignited,

²³ See Graham Asher, 2005 on the significance of this truce: <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero082105.html>

²⁴ See transcript of Al-Jazeera Mishaal interview: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/kalide.htm>. Mahmud Al-Zahar makes the same argument on the 8-28-2003. He explained that the *Hudna's* (truce) purpose was to fortify the internal Palestinian house, to avoid strife, and prevent Israelis and Americans from the opportunity to harm Palestinians. But the truce, he said, was misunderstood as a sign of weakness. See interview: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/zahaar.htm>

as the Road Map planned for in its initial stages [...] The Road Map boils down to security demands from the PA, so that it will attack the resistance, all to protect Zionist security, which has been exhausted by the resistance”²⁵ (our translation). Nasif’s statement indicates that Hamas was aware of the internal divisions that the US and Israel were promoting through the enforcement of the Road Map and that it was careful not to play into these designs by recklessly pushing polarization too far.

Nevertheless, the truce came to an end when Israel assassinated the political figure and the mastermind of the truce, Ismail Abu Shanab, after three months. In response Hamas carried out SMs. In addition to the desire to retaliate, Hamas aimed its response at countering the actions of other Palestinian actors, namely the PA faction that rejected the resistance. Again Hamas had to maintain a very delicate balance. Since mid 2003 Hamas became interested in abiding by a truce and avoiding internal strife, but continuous Israeli attacks on Palestinians and on the resistance pushed them in the direction of responding to the attacks to fortify their deterrence and ‘balance of terror’ strategy. The continuous counter maneuvering and strategizing of some PA members against the resistance made Hamas’ mission of balancing these two interests very difficult. Haniyeh put nicely the difficulties in balancing these two interests on 3 October 2004 when he described what Hamas was up against during the 2003 truce: “It is either that the Palestinian people kill themselves or that the occupation will continue killing them”²⁶ (Our translation).

In response to American pressure, Arafat appointed Abbas Prime Minister, in June, to reform the PA, but he resigned after three months because Arafat did not give him a free hand to attack the resistance. Abbas and his ascendant faction were also locked in a struggle against the Al-Aksa Brigades, the armed wing of Fateh that was continuing to wage armed resistance, including suicide attacks. Following Abbas’s resignation, Arafat appointed Ahmed Qurei as a Prime Minister and this same PA faction was going forward with the Road Map²⁷. For the moment, despite the growing dominance of the section that supported full collaboration with the US and Israel, the struggle within Fateh and the PA over the resistance had yet to be resolved. And though Hamas was under intensifying pressure, a decision to call off SMs would have further strengthened this anti-resistance PA faction; at this juncture ending the

²⁵ See interview: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/nasef.htm>

²⁶ See Haniyeh’s speech on Aljazeera website on the 10-3-2004 where he discusses the rationale behind the June 2003 truce: www.aljazeera.net/portal/templates/postings/pocketpcdetail.

²⁷ See Hroub(2004) for this argument. Both Abbas and Qurei were appointed by Arafat in response to uS pressure to reform the PA and abide by the Road Map demands.

costs of ending the terror would have outweighed the potential gains remaining. Zahar's declaration that Arafat asked Hamas to deploy SMs inside the Green Line only fortifies this point²⁸.

The costs of not responding to the hostile tactics of other Palestinian actors were very high. Israelis would interpret inaction as capitulating and withdrawing the path of resistance. And from Hamas' point of view, inaction could lead to further erosion of Palestinian rights that negotiations had already brought about. The decision to resume the SM campaign rested on the fact that polarization was not decisive yet, and the resistance path still resonated with active groups within Fateh and to a certain degree with Arafat himself. It rested on strategic political considerations whereby Hamas had to maintain a very delicate balance, preventing additional losses, yet simultaneously taking care not to overuse the resistance strategy, with its attendant risks of unrestrained polarization of Palestinian society and politics. Thus, in opposition to Bloom, Hamas' need to respond to attacks went far beyond the interest in pleasing Palestinian public opinion. Rather, the resumption of the campaign intended to counter the negotiation path pursued by this faction and assert Hamas' resistance strategy. As we will see shortly, once polarization of Palestinian society reached a high point and the PA faction that had no sympathies for the resistance took control of the PA, Hamas stopped its SM campaign. For Hamas, the resolution of the internal Fateh fight would only become clear with Arafat's death, when the US-Israel-backed faction took control²⁹.

As mentioned earlier retaliation and competition over popular support played a role in Hamas's decision to respond to the assassination of Abu Shanab and other leaders. Following the assassinations there was great popular pressure to respond. At this stage, Hamas was still pulled in the direction of retaliation in spite of the costs involved because popular demands mattered for preserving the resistance pole that had been successfully established. But whereas retaliation and sensitivity to Palestinian popular demands were at first positive factors that encouraged Hamas' suicide campaign, the need to retaliate and respond to popular demand soon became a burden on the movement. As we

²⁸ In early and mid June Hamas leaders were still convinced that there are other Palestinian groups that support the resistance and SMs. See for example Interview with Rantisi on the 3-30-2003: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/rantisi%281%29.htm>. Also see Zahar's declaration on the 29 of September 2010: <http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/185971>

²⁹ See Graham Usher's article 'Facing Defeat: The Intifada Two Years On'. In *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.32, No 2. (Winter, 2003: 34) for a description of the internal divisions within Fateh and the PA. He explains how the Abbas and Dahlan faction pushed Arafat to stop playing the resistance card to decimate the resistance and reorganize the PA in line with the CIA and IMF prescription. They were able to have their way once Arafat was marginalized towards the end of his life and after his death in 2004.

will show, retaliation and popular demand were factors that impacted Hamas' decisions to use SMs but were obviated once it became strategically irrational to continue the SM campaign.

Hamas leaders often explained that Hamas had to retaliate to Israeli assaults on Palestinians. In an interview with Yassin on the 30th of August 2003, after the assassination of Abu Shanab, the master mind of the truce, he said that the Jerusalem attack was a response to what Israel does day and night. And it came after calls from the world to stop these attacks. He said if Israelis will kill Palestinians, they will also have to be killed.³⁰

But unlike what Araj thinks, retaliation was not the guiding principal of the movement. As a resistance movement, Hamas responded to the killing of civilians and attempted to defend its population by launching counter attacks. The question remains, however, of whether retaliation or revenge is the movement's guiding principal. If we look at the number of deaths throughout the second Intifada we see that Hamas decreased its deployment of SMs amidst continuous Israeli assaults on Palestinian civilians and targeted resistance activists during 2004 (See graph 3, 6 and 7). More telling is the fact that Hamas completely halted its SMs in 2005 and did not resume them in mid 2006 when the number of Palestinian deaths and targeted assassinations of resistance fighters increased (see graphs 3, 8 and 9). And even more, one would have expected Hamas to retaliate in response to operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009, when Israel killed nearly 831 civilians. It is also reasonable to think that Palestinian popular support was high for such attacks after the operation in 2009, and in fact Palestinians committed attacks on an individual basis³¹. Yet Hamas did not resume its SM campaign.

Hamas also responded and retaliated for the killing of its own military and political leadership. Yet once the movement has made a strategic decision to stop SMs in 2004, Hamas' retaliation for its two top leaderships Yassin and Rantisi in March and April of 2004 was subdued. Hamas retaliated to these assassinations in August 2004 but was restrained in its deployment of SMs (See graph 6). Despite the strong popular pressure to respond to the killing of Yassin and Rantisi, Hamas did not re-launch its SM campaign because at this stage it was too costly. But at the same time they could not have ignored the

³⁰ See interview: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/yaseen2.htm>

³¹ The increasing number of individual Palestinian attacks on Israelis following the attack on Gaza since 2009 indicates that Palestinians were interested in attacking Israeli civilians, but that Palestinian organizations were not organizing such attacks. According to Ynet(2-10-2010) the Israeli daily news website there had been 20 cases of stabbings and 12 explosives perpetrated by individual Palestinians only since the beginning of 2010. The Israeli news item indicated that it is difficult to combat such attacks because the decisions were made individually and secretly.

popular demand to respond. Finally, an overall look at Hamas' use of SMs during the second Intifada from 2000-2008, shows that the retaliation argument is plainly flawed (See Graph 10).

The fact that Hamas did not operate according to considerations of retaliation is also supported by statements of Hamas leaders. In an interview with Haniyeh on the 20th of April 2004, following the killing of Rantisi and Yassin, he rejected the interviewers comment that Rantisi was killed because Hamas did not respond to the assassination of Yassin. He said "we are a liberation project and do not work according to considerations of revenge. We want to liberate lands and Jerusalem. Even if the brothers in the military section respond to Israeli attacks, this does not mean that you can reduce the project to that"³² (our translation).

In response to an interviewer's comment stating that Hamas uses SMs in retaliation to Israeli attacks on civilians and militants, Yassin said: "I do not agree with you. Al-Kassam brigades committed a lot of heroic missions in cases where there were Zionist assaults or massacres on our people and in cases where there weren't. Because our logic is to resist the Zionist occupation of our lands, when this occupation and their settlements go away from our lands and when we are free, then our resistance will stop. Maybe there are more incentives for the missions after the Zionists commit crimes against our Palestinian people, but our resistance and missions are not linked to those crimes"³³(our translation).

Both Hamas' actual patterns of SM deployment and Hamas official statements indicate that the decision to use suicide missions depended on larger strategic considerations. Although Hamas started to reconsider the utility of deploying SMs in mid 2003, we argue that it was still strategically rational for the movement to continue using SMs and to retaliate in response to Israeli assassinations at this specific time period. As a resistance movement, Hamas had to weigh the costs of action and of inaction. Until the opportunity for participating in elections presented itself in 2004 Hamas chose to continue with the resistance.

Moreover, we argue that Hamas' decision to agree to the truce was partly influenced by its concern and responsiveness to regional pressures. With the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the already existing American pressure on Arab regimes to attack Islamic resistant movements intensified, and Arab leaders were threatened and started exerting more pressure on Islamic movements. Simultaneously, the internal

³² See interview with Haniyeh: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/2004/haneyah.htm>

³³ See interview with Yassin on the 12-15-2002: <http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/hamas/hewar/yaseen.htm>

Palestinian divide increased, which made Hamas more vulnerable to external pressures. Hamas, thus, had to weigh its use of SMs in light of the political changes in the region.

Hamas leaders frequently mentioned that the Iraqi war increased American pressure on weakened Arab leaders. This regional change factored in Hamas' strategizing, because Hamas had an interest in maintaining good relations with the Arab world. First, Hamas sought to secure the status the movement had already earned in the Arab world, and which enabled it to continue its political role. Second, Hamas considered Arab allies to be fundamental for the movement and for the Palestinian struggle, in what they call the strategic Arab and Islamic dimension³⁴. It is also important to note that at the same time that Hamas was being pressured into stopping its SM campaign by Arab leaders, it was increasingly gaining official recognition by these same countries. Hamas' internal political weight as a result of the resistance strategy and the deployment of SMs, had been established and regional players had to acknowledge this fact.

This same regional context, however, will become more significant once the internal Palestinian political scene becomes completely polarized after the death of Arafat in November 2004 and when Hamas is encouraged to renounce the resistance and take part in political participation.

Ending the suicide Campaign

In spite of Hamas' decision to resume the suicide campaign in August 2003, Hamas was cautious in its deployment of SMs and the number of SMs continued to decline until the ultimate decision to stop employing them in 2005. At this stage it was too costly to continue using the SM campaign and no gains were to be made to offset the costs. At the same time Hamas became internally fortified by a large social base and the opportunity for political participation presented itself. The internal and external political changes taking place at the end of 2004 led to a shift in Hamas's tactics regarding the use of SMs.

First, the death of Arafat and the takeover by the pro Israel/US PA faction increased the danger of civil war; And Palestinian society had already become polarized. As mentioned earlier, Arafat even used Hamas' deployment of SMs to boost his position in the negotiations. Arafat also rejected a complete attack on the resistance, something that the new leading PA faction was more ready to undertake, ultimately increasing the risks of civil war.

³⁴ See Haniyeh's speech on Aljazeera website on the 10-3-2004 where he discusses the rationale behind the June 2003 truce: www.aljazeera.net/portal/templates/postings/pocketpcdetail.

Second, the Israeli government approved the plan to withdraw from Gaza in 2004. This approval decreased Hamas' motivation for continuing the SM campaign. The withdrawal was considered by Hamas leaders and supporters a success for the resistance³⁵, but at the same time the withdrawal delegitimized continuous attacks on Israel from Gaza.

Third, the withdrawal opened up an avenue for Hamas' participation in political leadership. As the occupation of Gaza came to an end, Hamas started to consider taking part in political leadership in Gaza. By 2004 Hamas became a major political force with a significant social base and simultaneously a possibility for an alternative route presented itself. The PA decided to hold three rounds of local elections before the legislative elections were held on the 17th of July 2005. Hamas decided to participate in the local elections and test its popularity, and indeed Hamas gained considerable seats on the first round of municipal elections on December 2004. A few months later Hamas won control of seven out of ten municipalities in the third round of local elections on the 27 of January 2005, setting up Hamas for participating in the legislative national elections in 2005³⁶.

Finally, the continuation of American occupation of Iraq maintained Arab leaders' pressures on Hamas to stop the deployment of SMs and take part in political leadership.

Thus, the same internal and external political considerations that led Hamas to agree to the truce in June 2003 were exacerbated in 2004 and at the same time other paths for action were opening up. In the early years of the second intifada, Hamas leaders argued that SMs increased Palestinian leverage. In 2004 SMs, though not stated clearly by Hamas officials, started losing their strategic advantage and the opportunity for political participation became a viable option. Clearly Hamas' strategies and rationalization had changed. Towards the end of 2004, Hamas was a movement with great popular support and a strong social base with an established large political pole behind the resistance. Hamas did not only turn out to be the main "savior" of Palestinian national interest, but it also proved that its political agenda of resistance was able to gain concessions from Israelis and liberate lands. From June 2004, the discourse of Hamas leaders changed and they perceived political participation in the election process and in the Palestinian government as a way for influencing the future of Palestine.

By March 2005 Hamas agreed to a *tahdiya* (calming) in what was called the Cairo Declaration, by which 13 Palestinian factions agreed to a military truce on condition that Israel stop attacking Palestinians and

³⁵ Hamas leaders state that the withdrawal was a response to Palestinian resistance because the resistance made it too costly for Israel to secure the settlements in Gaza.

³⁶ See Tamimi(2007) for information on the local and legislative elections(210).

free prisoners. In this declaration the PA and the Arab leaders officially recognized Hamas and it was formally considered part of the Palestinian political system³⁷.

Zahar summarized these changes saying that the political transformations were related to internal politics, Palestinian unity and international policies. Hamas was popular with a strong social grab and saw an opportunity to share political responsibilities. The *hudna* (truce), he explained, came in the context of a very powerful Hamas and one that has showed that it is able to commit suicide bombings in all of Palestine, it was not a *hudna* (truce) as a result of weakness³⁸.

Hamas' readiness to change its strategies regarding the use of SMs strengthens the rational strategic model that this paper adopts. Expanding Pape's strategic model, we tried to show that strategic rationality should be more dynamic. The dynamic model put forward in this paper accounts for the role played by external adversaries, internal players, and the political regional context. These considerations are important for different entities involved in conflicts but take special weight when we discuss disadvantaged resistant groups who confront powerful adversaries.

Hamas' decisions to employ SMs aimed at increasing Hamas' leverage in respect to Israel in what they perceived to be a very long term struggle for liberation. Liberating lands was not a short term anticipated goal, but the survival of the struggle was considered a success for the movement. Hamas' strategies accounted for rival Palestinian actors which were fundamental for the decision to employ and halt the suicide mission campaign. Hamas had to maintain a very delicate balance dealing with countervailing pressures. As long as SMs meant trouble for Israelis and did not risk internal Palestinian divide, Hamas continued with its suicide campaign. But when SMs became a burden on Palestinians and jeopardized Palestinian national interest, by increasing the chances for internal strife, Hamas restrained its use of SMs.

Hamas' preoccupation with internal strife undermines Bloom's 'market share' argument. Indeed Hamas was competing over Palestinian popular support and galvanized popular support for the resistance, but contrast to Bloom we showed that Hamas was interested in turning it into a hegemonic national agenda that prioritized Palestinian national interest over sectarian party interests. Similarly, we have showed

³⁷ For information on the Cairo Declarations and its significance see Graham Usher's piece in Al-ahram weekly on the 24-30 of March 2005 : <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/735/re1.htm>. Usher explains that Hamas's acceptance of the *tahdiya* (calming) should not be considered a sign of weakness. On the contrary it signals the strength of Hamas and the beginning of its political role in Palestine.

³⁸ See interview with Zahar : http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/palestoday/reports/alzahar22_12_2001.htm

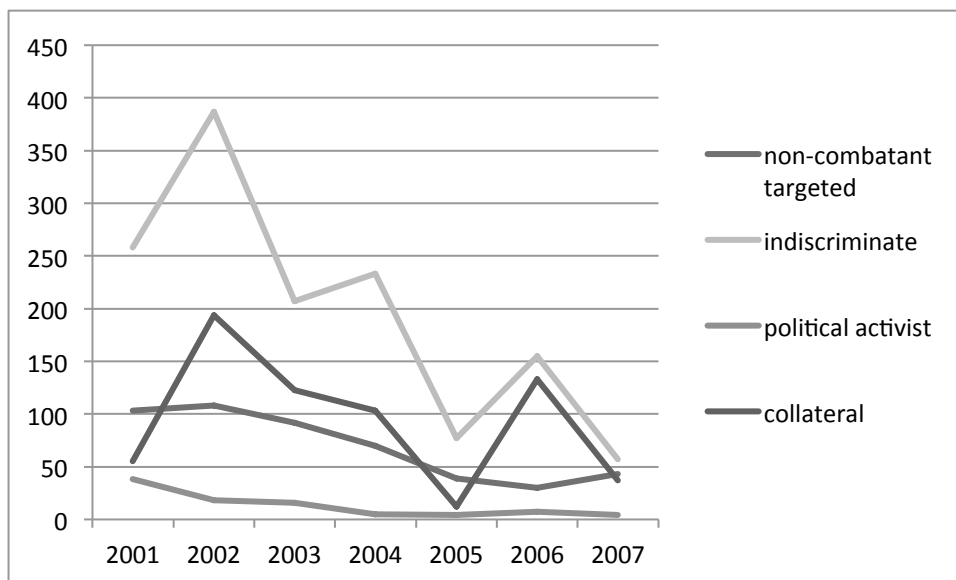
that although Hamas used SMs in retaliation to Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians, retaliation did not guide the movement’s strategic considerations. Hamas had to respond to Israeli attacks by launching counter attacks on civilians to make Israelis share the costs. But as we have shown, once retaliation did not correspond with the movement’s strategic considerations, Hamas abandoned SMs, despite of Palestinian public demands to retaliate. Moreover, external regional actors also influenced Hamas’ decisions to employ SMs, but Hamas was particularly responsive to pressures from regional Arab leaders when the internal Palestinian national unity was under threat and the chances for internal strife were high.

Finally, when taking part in political participation became a viable option, Hamas tried an alternative path to military resistance and SMs, which was less fraught with internal divisions and opened up new possibilities of action. Hamas’ leniency and responsiveness to internal Palestinian political changes on the ground since the 1990s further strengthens the argument that rational strategizing is Hamas’ guiding principal.

Discussion and Conclusion: (in progress)

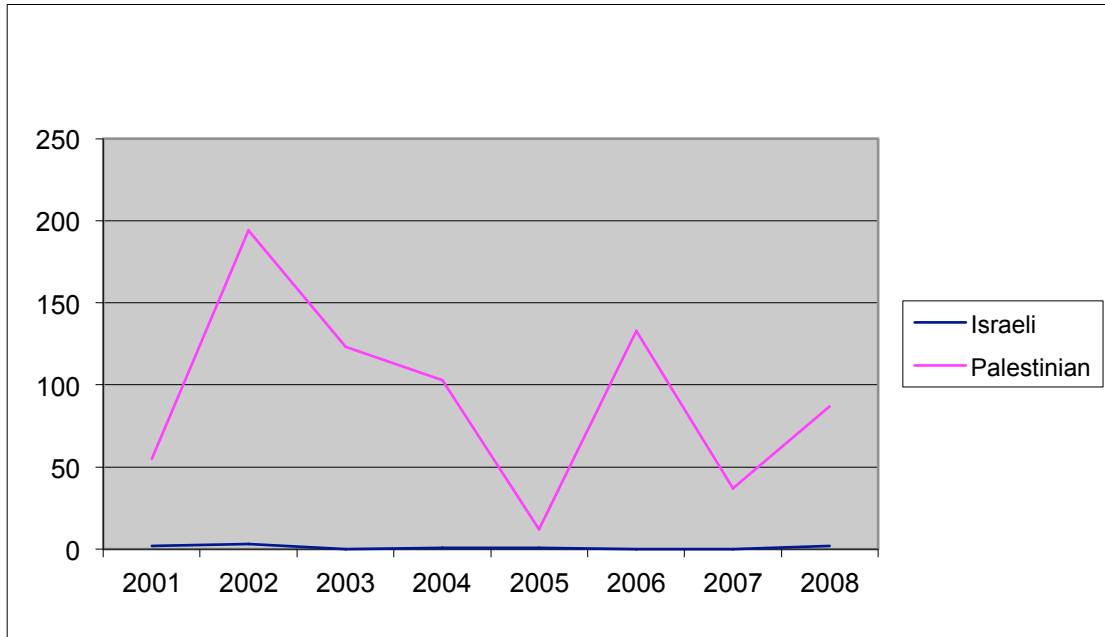
GRAPHS:

Disaggregated Palestinian Civilian Fatalities, 2001-07.



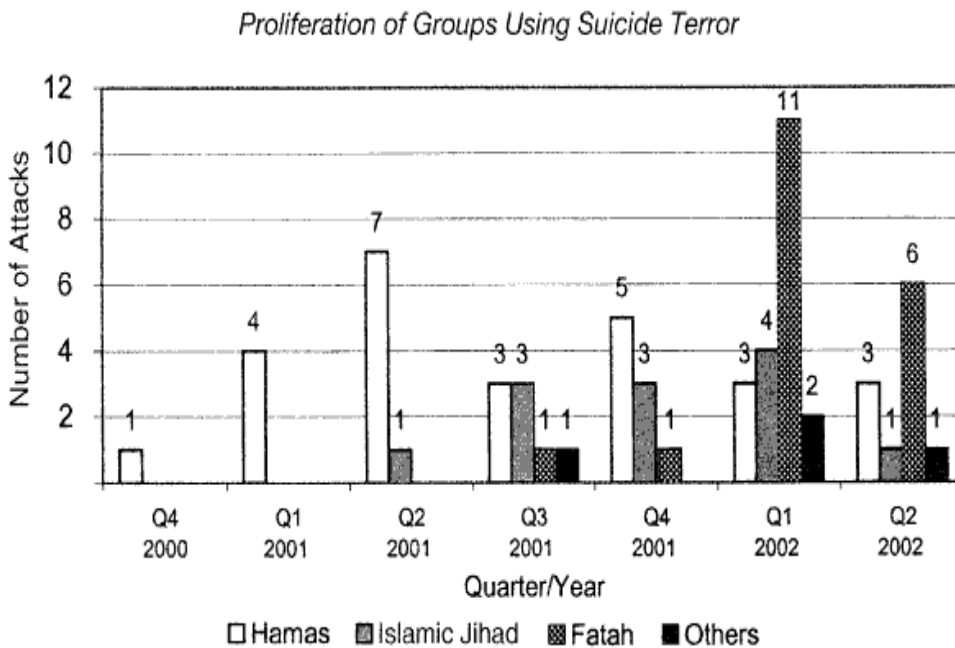
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Collateral Palestinian and Israeli deaths, 2001-2008.



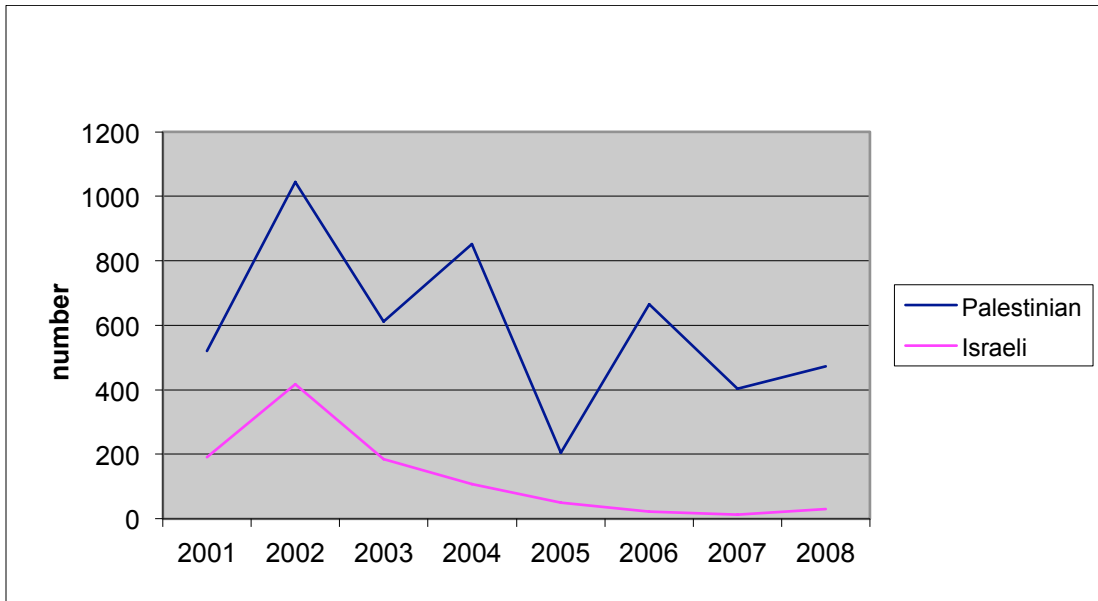
Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.

Graph 1: Distribution of Suicide Terror by Organization 2000-2002 (Taken from Bloom 2004).

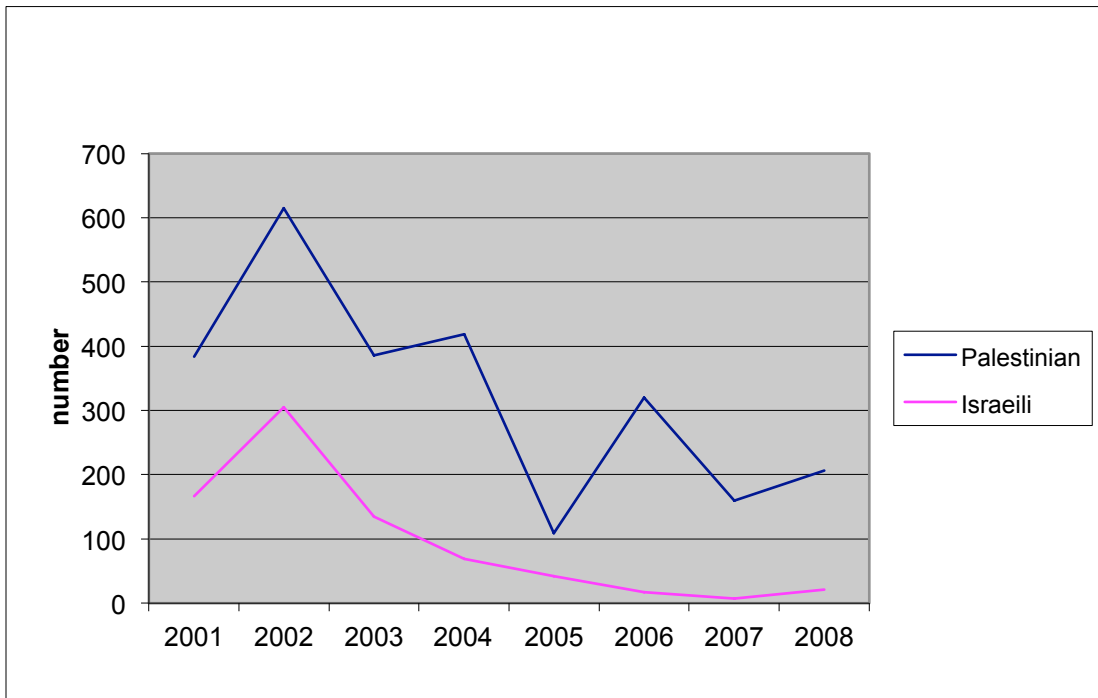


Source: Assaf Moghadam, 2003 (from Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post, and ICT).

Graph 2: Total Palestinian and Israeli deaths 2001-2008.

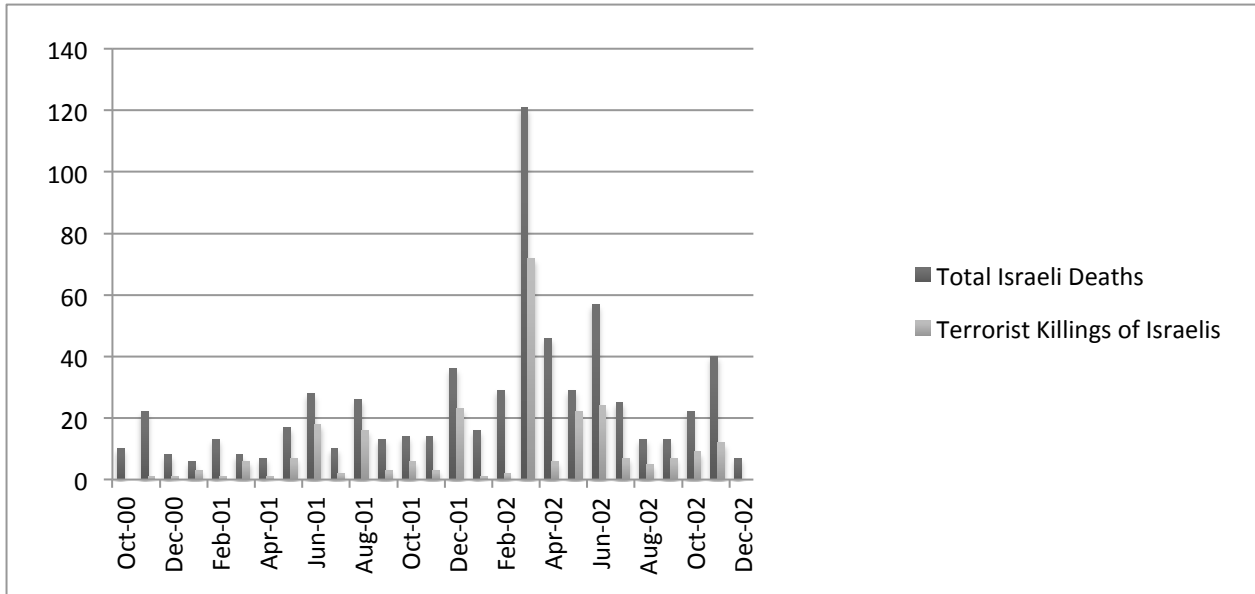


Graph 3: Total Palestinian and Israeli Civilians killed 2001-2008.



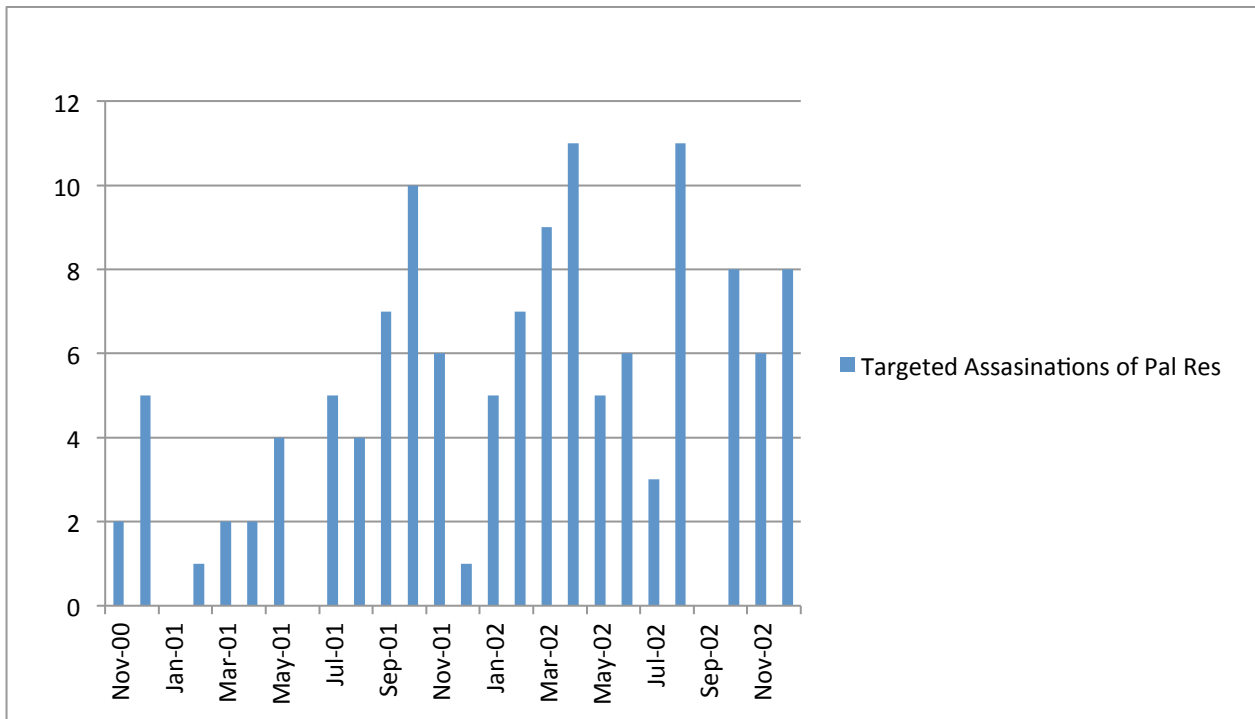
Source: Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.

Graph 4: Total Israeli deaths and terrorist Killings of Israeli Deaths, 2001-02.



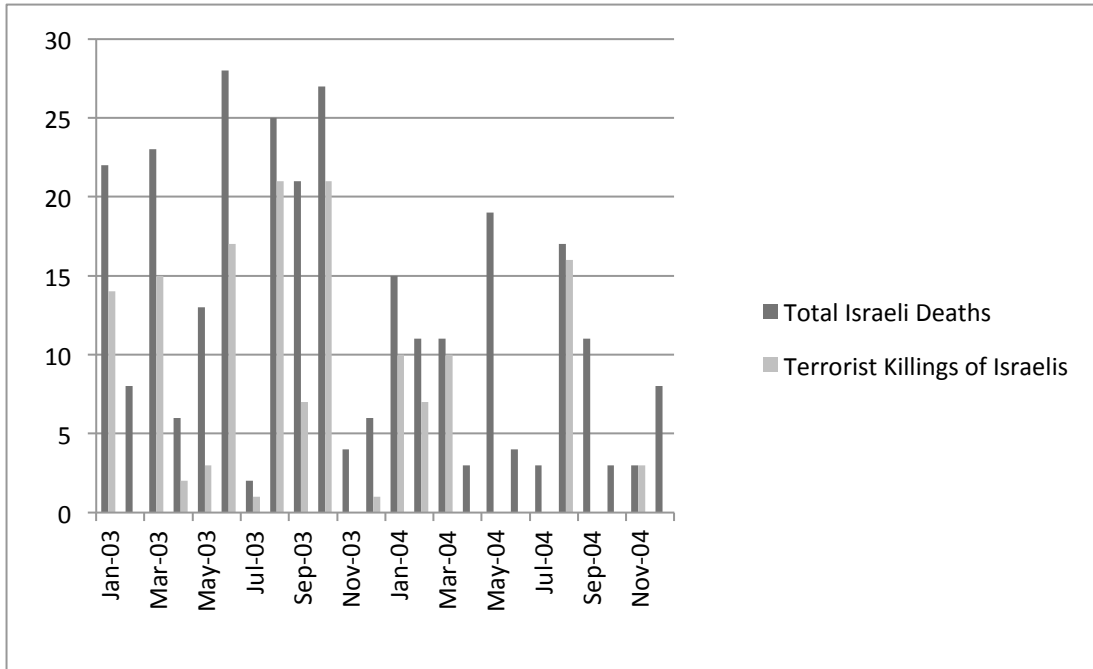
Source: Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.

Graph 5: Targeted assassinations of Palestinian resistance 2001-02.



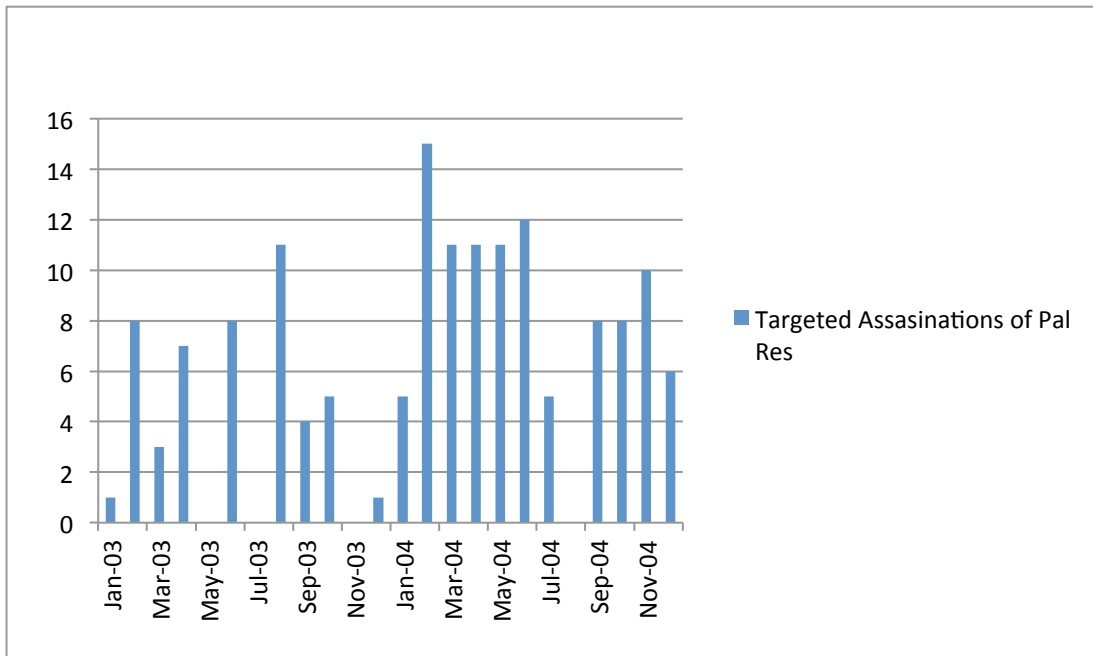
Source: Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.

Graph 6: Total Deaths and Terrorist Killings of Israelis by Month during 2003-04.



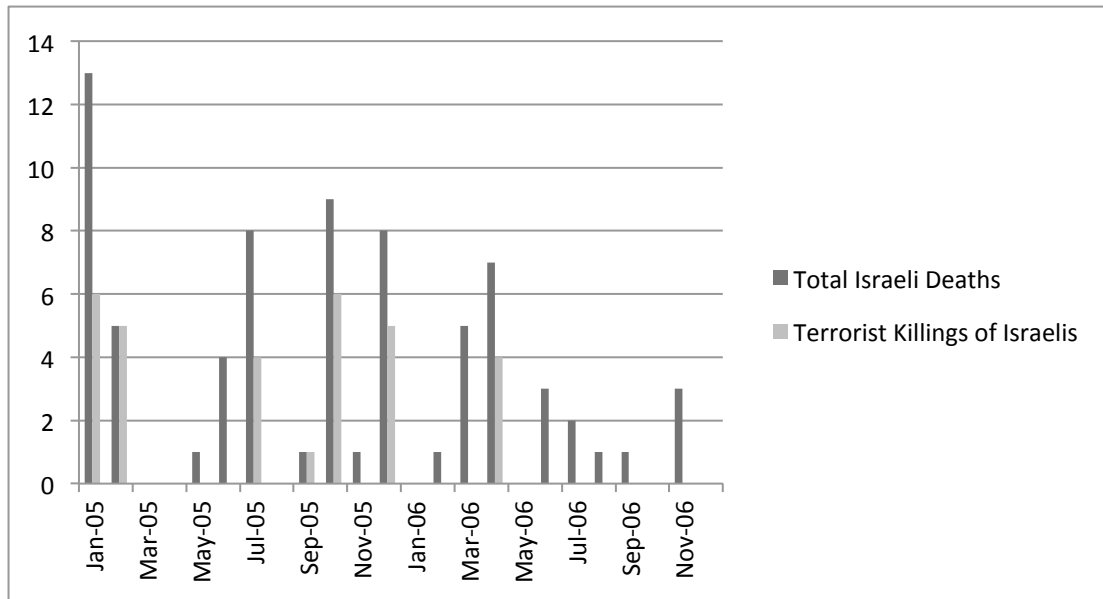
Source: Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports

Graph 7: Number of Targeted Assassination of Palestinian Resistance during 2003-04.



Source: Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.

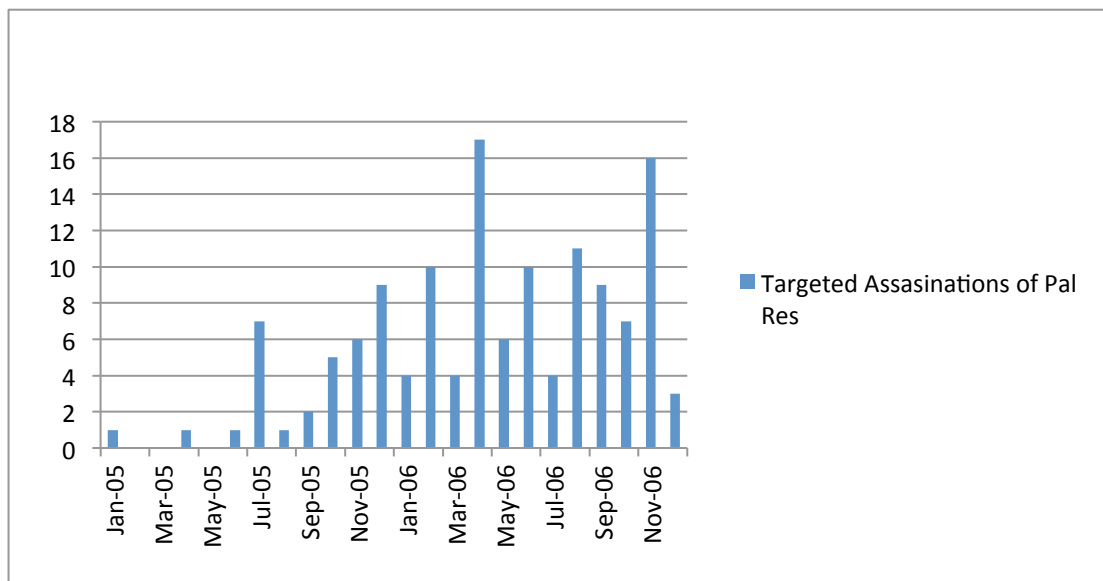
Graph 8: Total Deaths and Terrorist Killings of Israelis by Month during 2003-04.



Source: Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.

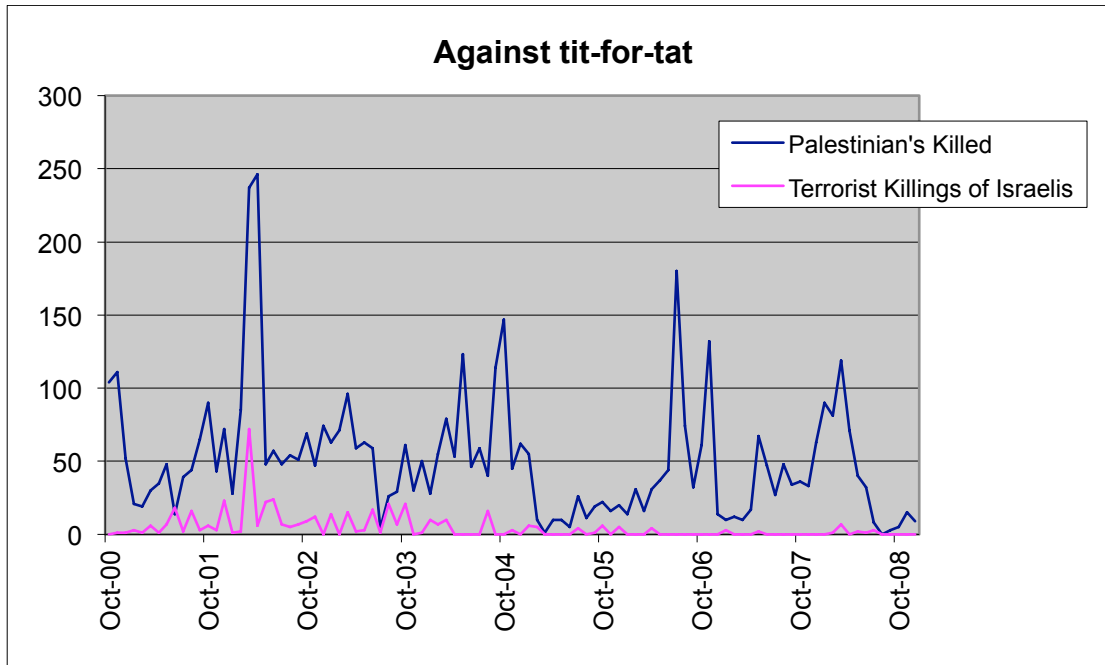
*The terrorist attacks that appear in 2005 and 2006 were not conducted by Hamas.

Graph 9: Number of Targeted Assassination of Palestinian Resistance during 2005-06.



Source: Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR(Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.

Graph10: Total number of Palestinians killed and Terrorist killings of Israeli's by month 2000-08



Data was collected and coded from Bt'Selem and PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights) reports.