

Opportunity, Culture and Agency

Influences on Fatah and Hamas Strategic Action during the Second Intifada

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abstract: Students of social movements dispute the causal weight they should accord political opportunities, political enculturation and human agency in influencing strategic action. They have made little progress advancing the debate on empirical grounds. The authors of this article reviewed English and Arabic newspaper accounts, read organizational histories and documents and interviewed key informants to explain variation in strategic action by the two main Palestinian militant organizations, Fatah and Hamas, during the second *intifada* or uprising against the Israeli state and people (2000–5). The authors show how perceived political opportunities and political enculturation influenced the strategic action of Fatah and Hamas leaders but find little independent effect of agency leading them to question whether recent claims about the supposed primacy of human agency in social movement strategic action may be exaggerated.

keywords: communal violence ♦ political sociology ♦ social movements

Three Influences on Strategy

Students of contentious politics are increasingly mindful of the roles played by opportunities, culture and agency in explaining strategic action (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) but disagree over the causal weight they should accord each factor. A spirited debate on this issue took place a decade ago, when Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper indicted the notion of political opportunity as ‘tautological, trivial, inadequate or just plain wrong’, depending on how it is understood (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999: 28). They noted that political opportunities have ambiguous effects. New political opportunities sometimes facilitate the emergence of social movements

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and sometimes coopt them. The closing of political opportunities sometimes dampens protest and sometimes incites it. Goodwin and Jasper applauded political opportunity theorists for recently admitting culture and agency into their arguments but criticized them for understanding these variables too narrowly and structurally, minimizing their significance and independent effects. Goodwin and Jasper even questioned whether political opportunities exist outside the way people's cultural filters interpret them.

Participants in the ensuing debate made useful conceptual clarifications (Jasper and Goodwin, 1999; Koopmans, 1999; Meyer, 1999; Poletta, 1999; Tarrow, 1999; Tilly, 1999). However, as Ruud Koopmans emphasized, the controversy cannot be decided by theoretical fiat; it is largely a matter for empirical investigation (Koopmans, 1999: 97, 100). We agree, and are surprised that we have been unable to find research that rises to Koopmans' challenge.

Accordingly, we set ourselves the task of investigating the degree to which political opportunities, culture and agency account for variation in the strategic action of Fatah and Hamas, the two main organizations of the Palestinian national movement, during the second *intifada*, or uprising, of Palestinians against Israel between 2000 and 2005.¹ We show that perceived political opportunities and political enculturation influenced the strategic action of Fatah and Hamas leaders but find little independent effect of agency. This finding leads us to suggest that recent claims about the supposed primacy of human agency in social movement strategic action may be exaggerated.

Before beginning our analysis, we offer a background sketch for those unfamiliar with the cases at hand.

Fatah and Hamas before the Second *Intifada*²

In the late 1950s, Palestinian university students led by Yasser Arafat and Khalil Wazir founded Fatah, which aimed to liberate Palestine from Jewish rule by means of armed struggle. In 1969, Fatah took control of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which an Arab summit had created in 1964.

Leading the PLO required much political skill because it harboured ideologically diverse factions. Tensions turned on the PLO's relationship with conservative Arab regimes vs popular revolutionary forces in the Arab world; the degree to which the organization should rely on violence; whether all Palestinians displaced by wars with Israel should have the right to repatriation; and whether a future Palestinian state should be founded in historical Palestine or the West Bank and Gaza alone. By 1988, the PLO had demonstrated pragmatism by moving a considerable distance from the principles it had articulated two decades earlier. Arafat

accepted three American conditions for opening dialogue with the PLO. He rejected the use of terrorism, recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted Security Council resolution 242 calling for Israel's withdrawal to the pre-1967 war borders. He also expressed willingness to accept a Palestinian state ruling the West Bank and Gaza. His consistency and sincerity were often questioned by observers in Israel and the US, but the direction of his movement was clear.

In 1991, the PLO's main sources of support vanished. In January, a coalition of countries invaded Iraq following its occupation of Kuwait. The PLO sided with Saddam Hussein. Consequently, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states cut financial assistance and political support. In December, the Soviet Union – another important source of political and economic sustenance – was officially dissolved. Meanwhile, Israel felt a mounting need to resolve the Palestinian problem because a relatively non-violent but politically and economically damaging popular uprising (the first *intifada*) had begun in 1987 and showed no sign of abating. In 1992, Israelis elected a new government headed by Yitzkhak Rabin with a mandate to sue for peace.

The stars had aligned perfectly for a left-leaning Israeli government and a relatively pragmatic PLO to endorse the historic 1993 Oslo Accords. The Accords involved four main principles: (1) recognition of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and of Israel's right to exist; (2) the renunciation by the PLO of terrorism and violence; (3) the agreement by Israel to withdraw in stages from the West Bank and Gaza; and (4) the concomitant creation of a Palestinian Authority (PA) to govern those areas. Outstanding matters – the question of Jerusalem, the refugee problem, the fate of Israeli settlements in Palestinian-controlled areas, security considerations and final international borders – were to be settled over the next five years.

A large majority of Palestinians initially endorsed Oslo but some expressed outrage from the outset – none more than Hamas and its followers. Until the 1980s, Muslim fundamentalists in the West Bank and Gaza were affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood but were little involved in direct confrontation with Israel. They believed that the creation of a more devout generation must precede national liberation. However, the 1979 Iranian revolution demonstrated that radical Muslims could be mobilized to overthrow a powerful, US-backed regime. The first *intifada* gave young Palestinian activists an opportunity to become politically involved and revolt against the reform-minded older generation. The Israeli government misperceived Islamism as a conservative counterweight to the more radical, nationalist ambitions of Fatah and the PLO, so it permitted the founding of Hamas in 1987 and the funnelling of money from Saudi Arabia to the new organization. It allowed Hamas activists to speak publicly, organize, publish and demonstrate while punishing the PLO for similar actions.

Oslo was the catalyst that helped to crystallize Hamas and give it its current form. In 1993, Hamas initiated a suicide bombing campaign aimed partly at derailing the peace process and reviving the dream of an Islamic state encompassing historical Palestine. Negotiations between Israel and the PA became bogged down. Israel allowed its existing settlements in the West Bank and Gaza to grow rapidly, thus violating the spirit of Oslo. To push Israel towards a final settlement, the PA imported arms and expanded its police force far beyond the limits specified by Oslo. From Israel's perspective, it did little to crack down on Hamas and other violent organizations.

Within a few years, the Palestinian public lost faith in Oslo. Bitterly disappointed and angry, they now saw violence as their only recourse. Support for Hamas and suicide bombing soared. The 26 percent of the Palestinian population who supported suicide bombing in 1999 ballooned to 66 percent a year later (Brym and Araj, 2008). Talks between Israel and the PA effectively broke down, and the second *intifada* erupted. Negotiations took place sporadically into 2001, but by then most Palestinians saw them as meaningless.

During the next five years, the political opportunities facing Fatah and Hamas, their organizational cultures and the creative efforts of their leaders led to a re-evaluation of their strategic principles. Sorting out the degree to which each of these factors influenced strategic priorities is the task to which we now turn.

Variables

Our dependent variable is strategic action. Our three independent variables are political opportunities, political enculturation and human agency.

A *strategy* is a plan of action for achieving broad policy objectives by gaining advantages over, and minimizing losses to, opponents. We systematically reviewed newspaper accounts in *The New York Times* and *al-Quds al-Arabi* ['Arab Jerusalem'], conducted 16 approximately 90-minute semi-structured interviews with key informants – seven senior leaders from Hamas, nine from Fatah – in the West Bank and Gaza in 2006 and reviewed organizational documents.³ These sources allowed us to identify four strategic dimensions that informed the actions of both organizations during the second *intifada*, and examine how, if at all, they changed over time. Organizational leaders asked whether they should (1) engage in suicide bombing and rocket attacks against Israeli targets, (2) declare a long-term ceasefire (*tahdi'ah*; plural, *tahdi'at*) with Israel, (3) negotiate a final peace deal and (4) participate in Palestinian presidential and legislative elections.

Leaders' answers were influenced partly by the political opportunities they faced. *Political opportunities* are aspects of states and organizations that are perceived to affect the cost of politically contentious action. In Sidney

Tarrow's (1994: 85) definition, they are 'consistent – but not formal or necessarily permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure'. Some people may view changes in political opportunities as an opening, others as a blockage, but in either case they represent a political opportunity shift. However, because ideological rivals see the world differently and use different vocabularies to describe such circumstances, we consulted two ideologically divergent sources to identify them: *The New York Times*, widely considered a newspaper of record in the US and much of the western world, and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, a popular, radical, independent Arabic daily published in London.⁴

We identified four potentially influential types of change in political opportunities during the second *intifada*. A shift took place when the Israeli security apparatus substantially increased or decreased the number of (1) assassinations of Palestinian militants and (2) violent deaths of Palestinians by other means (during riot control or Palestinian attacks), and when the governments of (3) the US and (4) Arab countries offered substantial inducements and/or made substantial threats that aimed to alter Palestinian strategy. Counts of these events are our measures of change in political opportunities. The authors coded political opportunities and strategic positions independently and resolved the few differences of interpretation that emerged on first coding by reviewing and discussing sources.

Aside from political opportunities, relatively enduring aspects of culture independently influenced leaders' strategic choices. Cultural understandings may be consciously chosen (Swidler, 1986; Tilly, 1995) or unconsciously imbibed as part of the 'natural' order of things (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1970). In either case, they influence the crystallization of ultimate goals, the tendency to favour certain means of achieving those goals, the demarcation of friends from enemies, the perception of a given political opportunity as an opening or a threat and so on. We refer to the learning of relatively persistent moral, cognitive and emotional outlooks as *political enculturation*. Such learning often takes place within political organizations. Cultures change, but generally more slowly than political opportunities do (Ogburn, 1966 [1922]). Big cultural differences exist between Fatah and Hamas but within these organizations we detected no significant change in moral, cognitive and emotional outlooks over the five years of the second *intifada*. Therefore, in the following analysis, organizational membership is used as a proxy for political enculturation.

The third independent influence on strategic choice is *agency* – the process of making plans in anticipation of future contingencies, and regulating and correcting them in light of their current and past effects. Such planning precedes social action. When a given course of social action achieves desired aims, it becomes habitual. When it fails, innovation becomes necessary:

people exercise creative agency (Bandura, 1989; Cohen, 2000: 76, 85; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Note the difference between agency and strategic action, our dependent variable. Agency involves planning. Strategic action is what people do to maximize gains and minimize losses.

While we discerned political opportunities from newspaper accounts of international, regional and local events, and actors' perceptions of them, we consulted organizational histories and conducted interviews with key informants for information about their political enculturation, the difficult strategic choices they had to make and the actions they took.

Equipped with the foregoing definitions, we first assess how Fatah and Hamas responded to changes in political opportunities during the second *intifada*. We find that they sometimes responded similarly, sometimes differently. On still other occasions, neither organization changed its strategic action. We also find that changing political opportunities explain more of Fatah's than Hamas's strategic change. These findings lead us to argue that organizational culture exercised a substantial independent effect only on some types of strategic change and only under certain circumstances.

In contrast, we find that, by itself, agency contributed little to major strategic actions. We strongly agree with the chorus of theorists who have recently emphasized that 'as long as there are choices, there will be agency' (Jasper, 2006: xiii). The following analysis supports the view that much action taken by social movement leaders is intentional, anticipatory, self-reflective and self-reactive. However, Fatah and Hamas leaders did not seek to further the aims of their organizations by stepping outside the constraints of structure and culture with respect to major strategic issues. This finding leads us to conclude that the recent social movements literature may exaggerate the independent effects of agency on strategic action.

Political Opportunity Shifts

We identified six major shifts in political opportunities, each defined by a substantial increase or decrease in the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces and/or substantial new inducements or threats made by the governments of the US or the Arab countries. Each row in Table 1 corresponds to one such shift. We now present our analysis of how, if at all, these six opportunity shifts affected the strategic outlook of Fatah and Hamas along our four strategic dimensions. Table 1 summarizes our argument. With six opportunity shifts and two organizations, 12 possibilities existed for change or continuity in strategic action. In the following discussion, we find that three of these possibilities are adequately explained by opportunity shifts (designated by OS in Table 1), three by opportunity shifts and political enculturation (designated by OS/PE) and six by political enculturation alone (designated by PE).

Table 1 *Opportunity, Enculturation and Strategic Response*

Strategic issue/period	Strategic response by organization	
	Fatah	Hamas
Israel–Palestine peace treaty/ summer 2000	Fatah leaders fail to bend to Israeli and American pressure and reject Barak’s peace offers because of norms crystallized before <i>intifada</i> [PE]	Hamas categorically rejects Israeli and American offers because of norms crystallized before <i>intifada</i> [PE]
Suicide bombing and rocket attacks/autumn 2000	Fatah central leadership condemns suicide bombing and rocket attacks because of norms crystallized before <i>intifada</i> [PE]	Hamas decides to employ suicide bombing and develop and launch rockets (drawing on repertoire dating back to 1993) [OS/PE]
Presidential & legislative elections/first half 2000	Under increasing international pressure, Arafat announces presidential and legislative elections (consistent with principles declared and acted upon in 1996) [OS/PE]	Hamas rejects participation in elections because of norms crystallized before <i>intifada</i> [PE]
Presidential & legislative elections/second half 2000	Fatah postpones legislative and presidential election [OS]	Hamas continues to reject participation in elections [PE]
Presidential & legislative elections/November 2004	Fatah decides to hold presidential election (consistent with principles declared and acted upon in 1996) [OS/PE]	Hamas declines to participate in the presidential election [PE]
Long-term ceasefire February 2003–February 2005	Moderate Fatah leaders take control after Arafat’s death and benefit from American–Israeli campaign against Hamas and Fatah’s military wing, convincing them to declare a long-term ceasefire [OS]	Campaign against Hamas causes it to accept long-term ceasefire (and agree to participate in legislative elections) [OS]

The Failure of Peace Negotiations

Summer 2000 witnessed what many observers regarded as enormous change in the international political opportunities facing Palestinians. The end of the Clinton presidency and the deadline stipulated by the 1993 Oslo Accords for reaching a final agreement on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict were fast approaching. Consequently, Arafat sought to push the Israeli government to fulfil the agreed-upon terms for force redeployment by announcing on 4 July that the Palestinians would declare independence unilaterally. American, Arab and other governments immediately pressed Arafat to postpone the declaration and continue working towards a negotiated peace by indicating that they would not recognize such a state (Mujaidah, 2000). Israel, headed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, threatened to declare sovereignty over Palestinian territory still under its control – almost 60 percent of the West Bank. Barak also called for a summit to reach a peace agreement before September 2000. President Clinton adopted the idea and invited Arafat and Barak to Camp David on 11 July.

Fatah had decided to participate in the peace process and negotiate with the Israelis in the early 1990s, so Arafat's agreement to postpone the declaration of a Palestinian state and accept the invitation to go to Camp David represented no more than a tactical change on his part. However, the carrots offered by Israel and the international community were insufficiently enticing, and the sticks insufficiently threatening, to cause strategic change involving the acceptance of a peace deal. After two weeks of negotiations at Camp David, Clinton declared failure.

For its part, Hamas categorically rejected American and Israeli threats and enticements. During the summit, Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin urged Palestinian negotiators to go home and choose the path of *jihād*: 'Hamas rejects any agreement that does not give the Palestinian people its right to return, the return of Jerusalem and Palestine, all of Palestine' (quoted in 'Al-Shaykh Yassin. . .', 2000).

If Fatah and Hamas refused to seize what the Americans and Israelis portrayed as a 'historical opportunity' and a 'generous offer' two months before the outbreak of the second *intifada* in September 2000, they had little reason to change their position once the *intifada* erupted. Contacts between Palestinian and Israeli officials aimed at ending the violence and saving the peace process continued until February 2001, when Ariel Sharon became Israel's prime minister. Sharon ardently opposed Oslo. His election (and re-election in January 2003) prevented the resumption of meaningful talks. Israel and the US boycotted political contacts with Arafat from mid-2002 until his death in November 2004 (Rubenberg, 2003, 343).

In short, changes in political opportunities in the months before the outbreak of the second *intifada* and during the uprising itself failed to convince Fatah and Hamas to accept a peace deal. As we shall see, the Israeli and American proposals were turned down because they did not meet the minimum demands that the political cultures of the two organizations prescribed (Table 1, row 1).

Suicide Bombings and Rocket Attacks

Many of the Palestinians who regarded the July Camp David meetings as an opportunity saw Israel's aggressive response to the rioting that broke out in September 2000 as a threat. Irrespective of perceptions, however, substantial changes in political opportunities took place on both occasions. In response to the opportunities of July, neither Hamas nor Fatah shifted strategy. In response to the threats of September and the months that followed, Hamas resumed suicide attacks (its first suicide bombing campaign took place between 1993 and 1997). After Israel launched Operation Defensive Shield in March–April 2002 – reoccupying most of the West Bank, systematically dismantling the infrastructure that supported suicide missions and imprisoning or killing many of the militants who organized them – the number of suicide attacks fell. Some militants then started launching rockets and mortars against Israeli targets. Between the outbreak of the second *intifada* and the long-term ceasefire declared in March 2005, Hamas was responsible for 44 percent of the 138 suicide attacks directed against Israel (Araj, 2008). The annual number of rocket and mortar attacks rose to 1475 in 2004 (Intelligence and Information Centre, 2006, 24; Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007). Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad were responsible for the overwhelming majority of them.

The outbreak of the *intifada* raised new questions for all militant Palestinian organizations. Should they see the *intifada* as an alternative to the peace process or a continuation of negotiations by other means? In either case, how might they increase the uprising's effectiveness? Numerous factors affected the way they answered these questions. One of the most important was the severity of Israeli repression.

During the first weeks of the *intifada*, the repertoire of Palestinian protest involved only demonstrations, marches, stone throwing and so on. However, as Israeli authorities themselves admitted, the harshness of their response was out of proportion to the intensity of Palestinian protest (Ricolfi, 2005: 94). From Israel's point of view, the Palestinians started the *intifada* after the Israeli government expressed willingness to make its biggest concessions ever, so the *intifada* showed bad faith and determination to gain advantage through violence. The Israelis therefore felt that a strong response

was necessary (Hafez, 2006). In addition, the *intifada* erupted just four months after Israel withdrew from Lebanon due to Hezbollah attacks. Israel wanted to prove that it was not weak and remained able to deter its enemies. Accordingly, it revised its 1996 plan for toppling Arafat and attacking areas under PA control (Reinhart, 2002). Finally, an Israeli election campaign coincided with the *intifada's* first months. Barak wanted to show that his policies towards the Palestinians were no softer than Sharon's were (Araj, 2008). Hence the severity of Israel's response.

Harsh Israeli repression motivated a surge in popular support for suicide bombing on the part of the Palestinians. Especially after Sharon first took office, and even more after the attacks of 11 September 2001, when the Bush administration gave Sharon *carte blanche*, repression intensified. As a result, Palestinian public support for suicide bombing remained high. Interviews with senior Hamas leaders in the West Bank and Gaza during the summer of 2006 suggest they believed the most effective way to stop the harsh repression was to make it unbearably costly for Israel (Araj, 2008; Bloom, 2005: 19–44; Brym and Araj, 2006, 2008). Accordingly, Hamas launched its first suicide attack of the second *intifada* in December 2000.

The assassination of more than two dozen Fatah militants and the killing of more than 1000 Palestinian civilians between September 2001 and January 2002 eventually led some local Fatah activists to launch their first suicide mission in February 2002 and their first rocket attack a month later (Table 2). In all, through the Tanzim or al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, local Fatah activists were responsible for 32 percent of suicide attacks during the second *intifada*. Significantly, however, these activists were young – mainly in their twenties, thirties and forties. Having grown up in the occupied territories, they were attuned to realities on the ground. They believed that Israel would not ease off and the *intifada* could not succeed unless they exercised extreme violence. In contrast, Fatah's top leaders were considerably older – mainly in their fifties, sixties and seventies. They had lived most of their lives in exile and were less in touch with the urgent demands of the Palestinian people for retribution against Israel. Perhaps most importantly, the central leadership had denounced terrorism, made agreements with Israel, received international financial support and feared that the use of extreme violence would give Sharon an excuse to destroy the PA. They had a political and bureaucratic stake in moderation, so they condemned the actions of the young activists, often strongly and publicly.

Our 2006 interviews with nine senior Fatah leaders support this assessment. The leaders unanimously denied that the organization's central leadership initiated the use of suicide bombing. Five said the initiative came exclusively 'from below' and three said it came from the middle and

Table 2 *Political Opportunity/Threat by Six-Month Period: Quantitative Variables*

Date	Deaths due to assassinations: Fatah targets	Deaths due to assassinations: Hamas targets	Other Palestinian deaths due to <i>intifada</i>
1 Jul. 00–31 Dec. 00	10	3	157
1 Jan. 01–30 Jun. 01	9	2	205
1 Jul. 01–31 Dec. 01	9	27	368
1 Jan. 02–30 Jun. 02	16	28	549
1 Jul. 02–31 Dec. 02	18	37	371
1 Jan. 03–30 Jun. 03	1	45	452
1 Jul. 03–31 Dec. 03	7	39	205
1 Jan. 04–30 Jun. 04	30	23	367
1 Jul. 04–31 Dec. 04	17	10	468
1 Jan. 05–30 Jun. 05	5	0	101

Notes: Deaths due to assassination include targets and collateral deaths. Data on other Palestinian deaths due to the *intifada* begin 29 September 2000, the first day of the *intifada*. We assume zero deaths from 1 July to 28 September 2000.

Sources: *al-Quds* ['Jerusalem'] (2000–5, Jerusalem); *al-Quds al-Arabi* ['Arab Jerusalem'] (2000–5, London); International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (2004); Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004); *The New York Times* (2000–5, East Coast final edn); Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2005).

lower ranks of Fatah. Seven of the nine leaders reported that suicide bombing did not represent the official policy of Fatah and only one said that it sometimes represented official policy (Table 3, questions 1 and 2). The evidence seems incontrovertible that Arafat gave the green light to violence in the *intifada's* first year or so. However, his repeated condemnation of suicide bombings, his willingness to meet with Israeli officials and declare a ceasefire, his attempt to dismantle the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in 2002 and interviews with people who were close to him in the period under study suggest that he was a relative moderate (Alimi, 2007; Araj, 2008: 295–6; Jamal, 2005).

We conclude that, in response to Israeli repression, Hamas resumed the practice of suicide bombing, which it first used seven years before the second *intifada* began. It intensified rocket attacks when it became extremely difficult to stage suicide missions. In contrast, Fatah's central leadership did not endorse such tactics. Indeed, some local Fatah activists undertook suicide and rocket attacks precisely because they believed that their organization failed to respond appropriately to changes in political opportunities in the form of increasing Israeli repression (Table 1, row 2).

Presidential and Legislative Elections

In mid-2002, Fatah declared its willingness to hold presidential and legislative elections. Hamas showed no interest in participating. As we

Table 3 Responses of Fatah and Hamas Informants to Selected Questions

	Hamas (N = 7)	Fatah (N = 9)
<i>1. Fatah's decision to use suicide bombing at the beginning of 2002 was developed: (%)</i>		
From above (by the central leadership as a whole)	–	0.0
From the middle (by leaders in the West Bank and Gaza)	–	0.0
From below (by field activists and local leaders)	–	62.5
From the middle and from below	–	37.5
<i>2. Regardless of how the decision of using suicide bombing was taken, what is your opinion of Fatah's suicide bombing campaign?(%)</i>		
It does not represent the official policy of the whole organization	–	87.5
It does represent the official policy of the whole organization	–	0.0
Most of the time it represents the official policy of the whole organization	–	0.0
Sometimes it represents the official policy of the whole organization	–	12.5
<i>3. Below I list some factors that might affect your organization's choice of tactics at a given time. Please review the list, add other factors that I may have omitted, and rank the list, placing '1' beside the most important factor, '2' beside the second most important factor, and so on. (mean on 5-point scale; high = less important)</i>		
Israeli policies and actions against the Palestinians in general	1.2	1.4
Israeli policies and actions against your organization	2.5	3.7
The mood and readiness of the Palestinian public for specific actions	2.5	2.3
International conditions	3.0	1.7
Conditions in the Arab and Muslim world	4.0	4.0
Competition with other Palestinian organizations	5.0	5.0
<i>4. In comparison with other tactics used by your organization, how costly has suicide bombing been to your organization (the Palestinian people as a whole) in terms of the human and material resources used, damage, etc.? (mean on 5-point scale; high = more costly)</i>		
Cost to organization	3.8	4.9
Cost to Palestinians	3.7	4.9
<i>5. Some people say that if the Palestinians had restricted their suicide bombing operations to Israeli military targets in the occupied territories, they would have gained more benefits and paid fewer costs. What is your opinion on this matter? (mean on 5-point scale; high = disagree)</i>		
Restrict suicide bombing to military targets in territories	4.3	1.5
<i>6. Is your organization willing to recognize Israel under any conditions? (%)</i>		
Yes or under certain conditions	0.0	66.7
No	100.0	33.3

shall now see, changing political opportunities influenced Fatah's 2002 declarations but had little or no bearing on Hamas's position until 2005.

Fatah supported elections partly because of Arafat's weakening position. Following the 11 September 2001 attacks, the Bush administration gave Sharon a nearly free hand to deal with the *intifada*. In early 2002, Israel released information indicating that Arafat was directly involved in attempting to smuggle a shipload of weapons from Iran to Gaza and that he had financially supported the military wing of Fatah and military attacks by the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The US then placed the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades on its list of terrorist organizations, and President Bush told reporters that he supported the idea of getting rid of Arafat ('Bush yw'yd . . .', 2002). To isolate him further, Israel placed Arafat under siege in his headquarters. In response, Arafat announced on 27 June 2002 that the PA would hold presidential and legislative elections in one year, Fatah would participate in the elections and he would be a presidential candidate.

Six months later, Arafat postponed the elections until Israel withdrew from the Palestinian cities it had reoccupied in Operation Defensive Shield. In doing so, he took advantage of two new opportunities. First, public opinion polls showed a substantial increase in his popularity among the Palestinians because of the actions taken against him by Israel and the US. The two countries lost interest in an immediate Palestinian election because it could not be expected to achieve their objective of replacing Arafat. Second, the Americans reduced pressure on Arafat because they sought support from the Islamic world in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq. Consequently, other means had to be found to minimize Arafat's power. Israel and the US hit on the idea of getting him to create the post of prime minister, giving the post real power and appointing a moderate to it. In February 2003, Arafat bowed to international pressure and appointed Mahmoud Abbas prime minister. This explains why Palestinian presidential and legislative elections were held only after Arafat's death in November 2004.

Hamas, which had boycotted the first Palestinian presidential and legislative elections in 1996 and refused any form of participation in the PA because it was created by the Oslo Accords, showed no interest in participating in the elections. Hamas also decided in December 2004 not to participate in the January 2005 presidential election. However, in March 2005, Hamas leadership decided to participate in the January 2006 legislative election, which it won handily.

Three new political opportunities led to Hamas's change of heart. First, the joint Israeli-American campaign to destroy Hamas weakened the organization militarily, financially and diplomatically but increased its popularity. A growing number of Palestinians gave Hamas credit for leading the resistance. They regarded Hamas's slain leaders as heroes, its suicide

bombers as martyrs. Second, as evidence of deep corruption in Fatah and the PA accumulated, Hamas endeared itself to the Palestinians by providing them with sorely needed social services and the appearance of incorruptibility. By March 2004, Hamas's popularity exceeded Fatah's for the first time, 31 to 28 percent ('hrk-a Hamas . . .', 2004). Its popularity was evident during the first stage of local elections (January 2005), when Hamas won a substantial percentage of the vote. These developments convinced many Hamas leaders that the organization would do well if it participated in the legislative election. Third, the assassination of some of Hamas's most radical leaders, such as Abdel Aziz Rantissi, empowered more pragmatic men, like Ismail Haniya. To the latter, 'harvesting' the organization's political gains began to make sense, the more so when they realized that winning an election might enable Hamas to stick to its principles while obliging the international community to deal with it directly, thus undermining America's anti-Hamas campaign (Tamimi, 2007a: 215). With the US pushing publicly for a democratic Middle East, how could it ignore an elected Hamas government, even one that refused to recognize Israel, renounce violence and adhere to agreements struck by the PA? This was the backdrop for the decision taken by Hamas's leaders to participate in the 2006 legislative election.

In sum, changing political opportunities weakened both Fatah and Hamas throughout the second *intifada*. Both organizations came to favour elections when it became clear that going to the polls could shore up their organizations. However, while Fatah decided to support elections early in the *intifada*, partly in response to international pressure, Hamas support came late and largely in response to brutal facts on the ground (Table 1, rows 3, 4 and 5).

Long-Term Ceasefire

Fatah and Hamas declared five ceasefires (*tahdi'at*) during the period under investigation. The first four were brief, lasting from a day to less than two months. They were tactical manoeuvres intended to avoid immediate losses – specifically, to prevent international isolation and Israeli retaliation for suicide bombings. Their proximate cause was temporary pressure by Arafat and the PA on the military wings of Fatah and Hamas: putting Hamas's leaders under house arrest, imprisoning militants who might disrupt the ceasefires, threatening the use of live fire and so on. They ended abruptly when Palestinian militants decided to retaliate against Israeli actions. As such, the first four *tahdi'at* do not constitute strategic shifts in our view.

The fifth *tahdi'ah*, declared in March 2005, was different. It lasted more than a year. With few exceptions, two of its most important principles, the cessation of Palestinian suicide bombing and the assassination of Palestinian

political leaders in the West Bank and Gaza, still hold as of this writing (November 2009). As we see below, in initiating the 2005 *tahdi'ah*, both Fatah and Hamas responded strategically to important changes in political opportunities – in particular, the unprecedented Israeli and American campaign to break the back of Palestinian militancy between 2002 and 2004.

The campaign's first stage involved the reoccupation of most of the West Bank in March–April 2002. Defence Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer clarified the purpose of the operation on 29 March: 'The security forces decided to initiate extensive operational activity aimed at conducting an all-out war against terrorism . . . whose aim is to crush all forms and all elements of the terrorist infrastructure' (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002). Then, a few weeks after Sharon's sweeping victory in the 2003 general election, Israel declared a comprehensive military, political, financial and diplomatic war against Hamas. Between January 2002 and December 2004, Israeli forces killed 271 Palestinians in assassination attempts and another 2412 Palestinians in other forms of armed conflict (Table 2). Intensive American efforts to crack down on Hamas internationally accompanied the Israeli campaign.

In response, Hamas proposed a *tahdi'ah* in November 2003. Israel rejected it out of hand, stressing that short-term *tahdi'at* only give militants a chance to prepare new attacks. However, Hamas's offer sent a clear message to the Israelis and the Americans: their campaign against the Islamic organization was paying off. The declaration in 2004 of Sharon's plan to remove Israeli settlers and forces from Gaza gave Israel additional incentive to strike hard. Israel wanted to cripple Hamas before withdrawing and argue credibly that its departure was not a sign of weakness.

Changes in political opportunities at the regional level made the situation even more difficult for Hamas and other Palestinian organizations. After the fall of Baghdad in 2003 and the American declaration of its intention to create a new order in the Middle East, most Arab regimes fell quickly into line. In summer 2004, Egypt declared an initiative to end the *intifada* and agreed to increase security measures preventing weapon smuggling from Egypt to Gaza after Israel's withdrawal. Jordan's King Abdullah II implied that Arafat should resign. According to Hamas, Jordan cooperated with Israeli intelligence in the assassination of Hamas leaders abroad. By curtailing their activities and threatening to expel them, Syria put pressure on militant Palestinians in Damascus to support the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and accept a long-term *tahdi'ah*.

In the midst of these efforts, Arafat died. The Palestinians elected Abbas president in January 2005, following which he met representatives of almost all Palestinian factions to work out details for a long-term *tahdi'ah*. On 17 March 2005, Fatah, Hamas and other organizations finally agreed on a respite. Hamas never admitted that its willingness to accept the *tahdi'ah*

was mainly the result of the Israeli, American and Arab campaign against its leaders, finances and military infrastructure. Instead, it justified its acquiescence by referring to the need for 'national unity' (Tamimi, 2007a: 2007b). Plainly, however, Palestinian militants in both Fatah and Hamas changed their strategy in response to threats posed by massive shifts in political opportunities caused by increased repression (Table 1, row 6).

Summary: The Effects of Shifting Political Opportunities

Our analysis suggests that Fatah was more responsive than Hamas to relatively 'soft' shifts in political opportunities, while it required harsh facts on the ground to move Hamas. Fatah's willingness to change strategy in response to international pressure – in the form of moral suasion, economic enticements and offers of support for its political ambitions – was most evident with respect to holding presidential and legislative elections.

Hamas did alter its strategy during the second *intifada*, but only in response to coercion and extreme violence. Harsh Israeli repression in the early months of the second *intifada* prompted Hamas's central leadership to encourage and organize suicide bombings and rocket attacks against civilians. Although Fatah's central leadership equivocated during the *intifada*'s first year, it remained largely opposed to suicide bombings and rocket attacks against civilians. Similarly, only when Israel substantially degraded the Hamas military infrastructure through assassinations, armed incursions and the like, and American political and diplomatic efforts substantially restricted Hamas's access to financial resources, did it agree to a long-term ceasefire and participation in legislative elections.

Six of the 12 possibilities for strategic change in Table 1 are thus explained wholly or partly by changing political opportunities. We now examine the effects of political enculturation on organizational strategy.

Political Enculturation

Fatah and Hamas leaders rarely interpreted and reacted to changing political opportunities in the same way because they each wore a set of cultural lenses that were ground in dissimilar circumstances and focused perceptions differently. True, recruits expressed varying levels of commitment to their organizations, and over time some of them switched allegiance. However, they enlisted partly because they found the organizations' ideologies meaningful and appealing. Joining an organization implied willingness to see the world filtered through the organization's cultural lenses, to become politically enculturated in an organizationally specific manner. In turn, the cultural lenses of each organization influenced strategic action in different ways.

Explaining both organizations' decision to accept the 2005 long-term ceasefire does not require the introduction of a cultural variable. As we saw, changes in political opportunities adequately explain the actions of both Fatah and Hamas on this front. However, cultural influences were decisive in other strategic choices. We illustrate this point by returning to the decisions on whether to engage in suicide bombings and rocket attacks, and to accept a peace deal with Israel.

Suicide Bombings and Rocket Attacks

During the second *intifada*, Hamas leaders decided to mount suicide bombing and rocket campaigns against Israel while the central leadership of Fatah demurred – largely, we contend, because leaders of the two organizations were culturally predisposed by events *preceding* the second *intifada* to react in different ways to Israeli repression and American diplomatic and financial pressure. Said differently, major strategic decisions taken by the PLO since the 1960s and Hamas since the 1980s became part of the two organizations' political cultures, and their political cultures in turn influenced strategic decision-making between 2000 and 2005.

In the late 1950s, Arafat and his associates began grinding the PLO's first cultural lens. For a decade, the Arab countries had been promoting pan-Arabism, a key element of which involved the creation of a unified military force to defeat Israel and liberate Palestine. However, the founders of Fatah now proclaimed it was time for Palestinians to take their cause into their own hands – a position that gained trenchancy after the defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 war. Inspired by left-wing national liberation movements in Algeria, Vietnam and Cuba, which used guerrilla tactics to overcome colonial rule, they challenged the notion that Israel could succumb to a swift military operation by a united Arab front and argued instead for a war of attrition by irregular Palestinian forces (Kurz, 2005: 32).

The trouble was that Israeli security measures proved highly effective against Fatah, partly because of the quality of Israeli intelligence, planning and military technology, partly because the geography of the West Bank and Gaza gave Fatah guerrillas little sanctuary. These circumstances forced Fatah to concentrate on building up its military capabilities in neighbouring countries. Therein lay the source of additional strategic change and, eventually, the grinding of a new cultural lens. In Jordan and Lebanon, Fatah squandered its energy and opened itself to external influence by becoming embroiled in various local confrontations and civil wars. Finally ejected from Jordan in 1970 and Lebanon in 1982, Fatah's central leadership was forced to operate from Tunisia, three countries and 2500 km west of Israel, until 1993. When in the late 1980s Fatah rejected the use of terrorism, recognized Israel's right to exist, engaged in talks

with the US and declared that it would accept a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, it was responding to the straitened circumstances in which it found itself. In short, on the eve of the second *intifada*, Fatah's political culture was that of a secular organization with a tradition of pragmatism, susceptibility to external influence and detachment from the people it purported to represent.

When the second *intifada* erupted, these cultural tendencies predisposed Fatah's central leadership to heed the insistence of the US for moderation and resist the growing demand of the Palestinian people for suicide attacks, especially those launched against civilians in Israel proper (outside the occupied territories).⁵ In our interviews, we asked senior Fatah leaders to rank factors that affected their organization's strategic action at a given time. They ranked 'international conditions' as the second most important of six influences. By comparison, Hamas leaders ranked international conditions the fourth most important of six influences. Moreover, while the Hamas leaders all said their chief aim was to defend the resistance and escalate the *intifada*, most Fatah leaders stressed that they wanted to keep the *intifada* popular and relatively non-violent. Typically, Qadoura Faris, one of Fatah's most popular leaders in the West Bank and a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), said:

We and the Israelis do not live on an isolated island. . . . There is an international community and international public opinion. . . . We wanted the *intifada* to be popular and non-violent. . . . Just look at the developments of the first months of the *intifada* and you will clearly see that Israel is the one who decided to change the rules of the game by flooding the *intifada* with blood. . . . The Israelis succeeded in dragging us to their most convenient position: military confrontation. . . . It was easier for Israel, the stronger party, to confront Palestinian militants rather than unarmed masses facing military occupation with their bare hands.

Moreover, Fatah leaders saw suicide attacks as costly and unproductive. When asked to compare the costs *to Fatah* of suicide bombing vs other tactics, six of the Fatah respondents said they were 'much more costly' and one said they were 'somewhat more costly'. According to Hussein al-Sheikh, a senior Fatah leader in the West Bank:

[Suicide attacks,] particularly those conducted by some Fatah activists, led the Americans and the Europeans to put part of the organization, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, on their terrorism list, which caused a lot of damage to Fatah's international image. . . . Also, Israeli reactions to martyrdom operations, such as assassinations and arrests, led [Fatah] to lose a large number of its best field activists.

When asked to compare the costs *to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian resistance* of suicide bombing vs other tactics, the responses were identical.

Abdullah Abdullah, a Fatah representative in the PLC and chairman of its political committee, outlined the costs as follows:

Martyrdom operations almost silenced the moderate voices in Israeli society, gave Sharon and his government a free hand to do whatever they wanted in the occupied territories and made Palestinians look like terrorists in the eyes of large sectors of the international community. . . . Those operations were not consistent with our values, religion, or traditions, or with international law and legitimacy.

We also asked our informants whether they agreed that suicide bombings ought to be restricted to Israeli military targets in the occupied territories. Six Fatah leaders strongly agreed with that statement, one agreed and only one disagreed (Table 3, questions 3, 4 and 5). According to Hussein al-Sheikh: 'Fatah policy in this regard is very clear since 1988. The "geography of the resistance" is limited to the territories that have been occupied in 1967 and the targets should be only Israeli soldiers or armed settlers.'

Utterly different strategic predispositions were embedded in the organizational culture of Hamas. Its first cultural lens was ground in the late 1980s as a result of deepening scepticism that Fatah could ever achieve the Palestinian national movement's objectives. Islamism, inspired by the 1979 Iranian revolution, now began to overshadow Fatah nationalism (Abu-Amr, 1994: 13). The revolution introduced a new version of political Islam that blamed western powers and the secular regimes of Muslim countries for the failings of the Islamic world, and adopted new forms of violence to do away with these perceived impediments to change.

Significantly, Hamas took shape not in Cairo, Amman, Beirut and Tunis, but in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza. Before the 1950s, Gaza boasted no significant urban agglomeration like the relatively cosmopolitan and secular city of Ramallah in the West Bank. Densely settled by religiously conservative villagers who fled the 1948–9 war with Israel, Gaza's population was deeply impoverished and embittered: an ideal environment for the growth of Islamism (Abu-Amr, 1994: 20–1).

Most of Hamas's leaders and military activists were born, raised and radicalized in the occupied territories, with three important consequences for later strategic developments. First, spending their entire lives under Israeli military occupation made Hamas members more sensitive to the deprivations and demands of the Palestinian people than Fatah's central leadership was (Abu-Amr, 1994: 79; Araj, 2008). Hamas enjoyed especially strong ties to refugees and their descendants, who comprised the more radical half of the Palestinian population. Tellingly, six of the seven men who took part in the meeting that led to the establishment of Hamas were themselves refugees (Jamal, 2005: 107). Second, tight Israeli security measures often prevented Hamas activists from employing the methods of attack and types of weaponry that were the stock-in-trade of guerrillas

elsewhere. Their inability to stage typical guerrilla raids stimulated innovative thinking about unconventional methods and weapons. According to Khalil abu Laila, a senior Hamas leader in Gaza:

When Hamas started using suicide bombing in 1993, the Palestinians did not have any other [military] weapons. . . . We had to create our own weapons from the limited materials we had. Yahya Ayash [Hamas's first famous bomb maker] was able to transform any material in the house into bombs. I mean he used to turn sugar and washing detergent such as Tide into bombs. He also taught others how to do so.

Third, operating inside the occupied territories made Hamas better able to avoid side battles with Arab forces, like those that weakened Fatah, and less susceptible to outside influence than Fatah was (Tamimi, 2007b: 268).

Susceptibility to outside influence hinged partly on perceptions of Israel-US relations. Already in the 1980s, Fatah leaders came to believe that 'only Washington counted' and that Israel's decisions were 'made in Washington and not in Tel Aviv' (Rubin, 1997: 153). As a result, Fatah remained relatively responsive to American demands throughout the second *intifada*. In contrast, Hamas leaders held that Israel and the Jewish lobby in the US controlled American Middle East policy, leading them to conclude that 'we must depend on the nation's options of *jihād* and resistance rather than American or other mediations'. It followed that diplomacy was 'a waste of time and an exercise in futility', and that 'whatever was taken by force would be regained only by force' (Hamas communiqué, quoted in Alexander, 2002: 107, 192). When we asked our Hamas informants to rank various influences on Hamas decision-making, the top three influences concerned conditions on the domestic front. The mean scores for perceptions of the influence of domestic conditions were all higher for Hamas than for Fatah leaders (Table 3, question 3). To support their analysis, Hamas leaders often referred to the failure of the Oslo peace process and the success of Hezbollah in forcing Israel to withdraw from Lebanon in May 2000 without preconditions (Alexander, 2002: 256; Tamimi, 2007b: 197).

Clearly, Hamas members were culturally predisposed to become the first Palestinian organization to launch a suicide attack against Israel in 1993, deploy suicide bombers during the second *intifada* and launch rockets after counterterrorist measures made suicide bombing more difficult. They reiterated their faith in violence during our interviews. When asked to compare the costs to their organization and to the Palestinian people of suicide bombing vs other tactics used by their organization, the seven Hamas leaders we interviewed saw them as less costly than Fatah leaders did, and some of them, such as Khalil abu Laila, enthusiastically listed their benefits:

Martyrdom operations enabled us to get rid of the unjust Oslo Accords, put the Palestinian cause back on the right path, mobilize the Palestinians around the choice of resistance and attract Arabic and Islamic attention and support. . . . They also put an end to the Zionist dream of expanding Israel to include the area between the Nile River [Egypt] and the Furat River [Iraq]. Instead, and for the first time, martyrdom operations forced the Israelis to separate themselves from the West Bank by building a wall and hiding behind it.

Another Hamas leader, Abd al-Fattah Dukhan, focused on the retaliatory nature of suicide bombing:

They [the Israelis] target our civilians all the time, [so] martyrdom operations treat them the same way. . . . Our first suicide attacks came to avenge the killing of 29 Palestinians in the al-Harem al-Ibrahim [in 1993] as well the massacre that took place earlier in the al-Aqsa Mosque [in 1991].

Unlike Fatah leaders, Hamas leaders strongly disagreed with the view that suicide bombings should be restricted to Israeli military and settler targets in the occupied territories (Table 3, questions 4 and 5). Mushier al-Mussri, Hamas spokesperson in Gaza, defended Hamas's position as follows: 'They attack our cities, so we have the right to attack theirs. . . . In addition, [suicide attacks inside Israel proper] are more effective because they inflict more damage.' Moreover, while the central leadership of Fatah condemned Hamas's suicide bombings – as well as the later and less numerous attacks by young Fatah activists – there was never any conflict between the central leadership of Hamas and its military wing. Hamas's political leaders personally gave the go-ahead for numerous suicide and rocket operations (Gunning, 2007: 115). Some of our Hamas informants commented on this issue by referring to the religious ideology of the organization:

Islam is very clear. If one foot of an Islamic land has been occupied, then *jihād* and resistance become religious duty [*fard*]. . . . The al-Qassam Brigades [Hamas's military wing] do not do anything that contradicts the general lines determined by the political leadership. . . . Any [Hamas] leader who condemns an act of *jihād* will be sent home right away [i.e. will have to resign]. (Fathi Hammad, a senior Hamas leader in Gaza).

In sum, it seems that cultural predispositions formed for the most part before the beginning of the second *intifada*, not structural circumstances during the second *intifada* itself, largely account for the eagerness of Hamas leaders to engage in suicide missions and rocket attacks, and the reluctance of the Fatah central leadership to follow suit (Table 1, row 2).

The Failure of Peace Negotiations

Cultural factors also help to explain why both Fatah and Hamas rejected the Israeli–American peace proposals offered at Camp David in 2000 and failed to revive peace discussions during the second *intifada*.

Hamas's political vision was strongly influenced by its Islamic ideology (Gunning, 2007: 198). Regarding Israel as 'a colonial entity planted in the heart of the Muslim world whose effect is to obstruct the revival of the *ummah*, the global Muslim community, and to perpetuate Western hegemony in the region', Hamas always refused to recognize the country's legitimacy (Tamimi, 2007a: 157). The fact that Muslims originally faced Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque while praying and that al-Aqsa is the third holiest site in the Muslim world made their antipathy to Israel all the greater and made it seem sensible that the chief goal of the organization should be to liberate all of Palestine and replace it with an Islamic state. No mere change in political opportunities could efface Hamas's view that peace negotiations were a waste of time and a potential threat to Palestinians' historical right to all of Palestine. None of the Hamas informants we interviewed expressed willingness to recognize the state of Israel under any circumstance (Table 3, question 6). They were willing to offer Israel only a long-term truce if it agreed to withdraw fully from the West Bank and Gaza, release all Palestinian prisoners, stop all hostilities and allow the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital.

For Fatah, the situation was more complicated, but in the end the organization's political culture also predisposed its members to reject the peace terms that Israel was prepared to offer: although Fatah was prepared to concede much, it could not cross a red line that had been established before the outbreak of the second *intifada* and that the changing political opportunity structure between 2000 and 2005 did nothing to alter. Specifically, Fatah was willing to give up 78 percent of the territory of historical Palestine in exchange for the creation of a viable, independent state in the West Bank and Gaza based on the international borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. When we asked our informants if they were willing to accept the existence of the state of Israel, at least under certain conditions, two-thirds of the Fatah informants who answered the question said 'yes'.

At Camp David, Israel sought to retain sovereignty over Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem and offered only 'shared sovereignty' over al-Aqsa mosque. It wanted to annex the Jewish settlements that ring Jerusalem and jut deep into the West Bank, effectively ensuring that the Palestinian state would consist of three non-contiguous regions (the northern West Bank, the southern West Bank and Gaza). Questions concerning control over natural resources and the refugee issue also remained unresolved. Before the breakdown of the Camp David talks, Fatah seemed on the verge of making concessions regarding the right of return in exchange for control over all of the West Bank and Gaza (Lesch, 2008: 120). However, without guaranteed control, Arafat could compromise no further. Cultural barriers prevented it. Ingrained in Fatah ideology – and in the worldview

of the Palestinian population – were certain minimum demands that could not be abandoned. At Camp David, Clinton tried to convince Arafat to accept partial Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount. He offered financial inducements and a presidential compound inside the Muslim Quarter of the old city of Jerusalem, and threatened to cut off foreign aid and wash his hands of the peace process if Arafat refused. Arafat's reply: 'I will not betray my people or the trust they have placed in me. . . . Do you want to come to my funeral? I would rather die than agree to Israeli sovereignty of *Haram al-Sharif*' (quoted in Swisher, 2004: 327, 304).

Conclusion: The Problem of Agency

People do not usually have to strategize much when they play out their daily routines. They rely on roles embedded in social structures and traditions embedded in cultures to solve habitual problems. They become more creatively agentic only when routines break down. As expectations founder, they begin to make tough choices and new plans. When they act on those plans, they may change social structure and culture (Jasper, 2004: 7). However, even agency does not create the world anew. That is because people draw on existing repertoires to fashion strategies. We believe that if it were possible to place strategies on a range of innovativeness, most would be clustered at the 'less innovative' end. It is an open question whether truly creative breakthroughs are rarer in science or political life.

That, in any event, is one conclusion we draw from our analysis of Fatah and Hamas strategizing during the second *intifada*. Our analysis revealed an abundance of agency. Throughout the second *intifada*, Fatah and Hamas leaders were intentional, anticipatory, self-reflective and self-reactive, making plans in anticipation of future contingencies and regulating and correcting their actions in light of their current and past effects. On the other hand, their actions reveal few truly creative breakthroughs. During a five-year period when Israel crushed Palestinian hopes and expectations many times over, neither Fatah nor Hamas modified their minimum demands for a peace settlement. Fatah's central leadership never changed its position on suicide bombing. Although Hamas launched suicide attacks from the very start of the second *intifada*, in doing so it drew on a strategic repertoire that had been in place since 1993. Fatah's flexibility on the question of elections and a long-term ceasefire was similarly rooted in organizational tradition. Hamas had to be ground into submission before relenting on the latter fronts and replacing suicide missions with comparatively ineffective rocket attacks.

Stating the matter differently, the strategic actions we identified were largely a response to shifting political opportunities and cultural desiderata, not human agency. On the advice of Charles Kurzman, we approached

our historical/comparative study using the same logic that quantitative sociologists deploy in multiple regression analysis (Kurzman, 2004: 118). Agreeing with James Jasper that agency is a causal mechanism (Jasper, 2004: 1), and with Stephan Fuchs that agency may explain the variance that social structure and culture cannot account for (Fuchs, 2001: 34), we set out to assess the degree to which changing political opportunities, differences in political enculturation and agency explain variation in strategic action. We found that some major actions were responsive to shifting political opportunities (indicated by the designation OS in the last two columns of Table 1), others were responsive to differences in political enculturation (indicated by PE) and still others were responsive to both (indicated by OS/PE). However, after taking opportunities and culture into account, we found little variation remained to be explained by agency.

Given that agency by itself can explain none of the main strategic actions taken by two leading political organizations during an especially turbulent and consequential period of Middle East and world history, analysts might consider moderating bold claims about agency's supposedly universal causal primacy over political opportunities and culture. A more productive approach would seem to involve a programme of empirical research that seeks to identify the social conditions under which agency, culture and opportunity exercise independent and historically variable causal effects on action.

Notes

1. For clarity, we transliterate Arabic phonetically in the body of this article. For precision, we transliterate Arabic references according to the standards of the Middle East Studies Association.
2. This section is based mainly on Jamal (2005), Kimmerling and Migdal (2003), Mishal and Sela (2000), Robinson (2004) and Sayigh (1997).
3. See Araj (2008) for details concerning the interviews.
4. We consulted *al-Quds al-Arabi* rather than local Palestinian newspapers partly out of convenience (only *al-Quds al-Arabi* has an online archive covering the second *intifada*), but mainly because it is more independent and, uniquely, maintains an editorial position that overlaps Fatah and Hamas (staunchly secular, it nonetheless rejects Oslo).
5. Even the young dissidents of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade did not launch suicide attacks until the 16th month of the second *intifada*, long after Hamas had repeatedly done so, and only in response to the assassination of Raed al-Karmi, a folk hero and leader of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade militia in Tulkarem.

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