

The Terrorist “Wing” Scam

by A.J. Caschetta

Modern terrorist organizations have managed to flourish despite their enemies’ attempts to squash them and have often done so by hiding in plain sight behind a nominal disguise. The most successful groups have achieved a kind of parity with the countries they attack by masquerading as complicated and diverse establishments for which terror is but one facet of their true—and variegated—nature. Nearly all terrorist organizations operating today have learned to conduct effective subterfuge by pretending to diversify.

On the rhetorical level, the illusion is advanced when a terror organization claims for itself an ancillary “wing,” “arm,” or “branch.” Most often it is either a “charitable wing” that operates orphanages and hospitals and distributes aid to the poor, or a “political wing” devoted to achieving the group’s aims through negotiation. In reality though, the group and its newly-sprouted wings are never separate but rather integral, interdependent parts of a whole. The pose allows them to prosper by legitimizing their continued existence as aid providers or embryonic governments rather than terrorist groups.

Even if a group does not itself refer to the new organization as its wing, eager journalists, academics and politicians surely will. The illusion of segmentation is among the most effective tools in the terrorists’ propaganda kit as they cleverly play on the compassionate nature of their targets and exploit the myth that all charities are inherently good, that philanthropy is intrinsically a praiseworthy undertaking, and that freedom to



Terrorist groups pose as providers of charitable services to help them continue their violent activities. Above, ISIS’s logo is slapped onto care packages as the jihadist group rebrands aid from the U.N. and other sources. The Muslim Brotherhood continues as both a dispenser of social services and an incubator for jihad. The Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, also dispenses medical relief.

practice one's religion is a universal right even when that practice denies basic human rights to others.

Western nations are keen on rewarding those who participate in a democratic process and engage in negotiations because this is seen as the rational, civilized way to bridge differences. Mere participation in the political process becomes a desirable outcome in and of itself. Western nations also give generously to charitable causes and facilitate the work of others who do likewise. Terrorists understand this, and so like the proverbial wolf in sheep's clothing they disguise their violent nature with the cloak of legitimacy through their nonviolent wings. Only by exposing the "wing" charade can states begin to adopt policies that effectively counter this ubiquitous tactic.

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gains the time and space necessary to sustain a campaign of violence.

Terrorist organizations that use this subterfuge are merely following a

template perfected by other criminal organizations. For traditional criminal syndicates trading in stolen or illegal products and services, this has historically involved the creation of "dummy" or "shell" companies to hide their illicit work and profits. Likewise, criminal gangs and drug dealers have long known that distributing goods to the poor (turkeys at Thanksgiving or toys at Christmas)² can buy them a degree of support and silence. The most successful terrorist organizations achieve a kind of respectability either by launching quasi-political branches or by operating charities, thus purchasing the toleration and even loyalty of those in their areas of operation.

A target state that agrees to negotiate with the political wing of a terrorist organization does so largely because of a credible threat of violence. Once a state falls for the phony compartmentalization, acknowledging or negotiating with a terrorist group's wing, the bait has been taken. The con then evolves as the political wing offers to dissuade the military wing from undertaking more violence. Similarly, a target state will often give money to the charitable wing of a terrorist group in the hope that this action will sway hearts and minds within the population from which future terrorists are likely to emerge. The opposite, though, is true. A terrorist group with a charitable wing that operates a hospital, school, or orphanage has cleared a path to hiding both money and suspects; it can handily treat wounded terrorists and inculcate new ones. Further, any outside funds that go to humanitarian initiatives run by

The Confidence Game

In the late nineteenth century, many radical organizations reveled in their infamy and wore the label terrorist proudly.¹ But after World War II, most sought to distance themselves from the newly-stigmatized term, calling themselves instead revolutionaries, freedom fighters, or resisters to imperialism.

At the same time, however, another trend emerged in which terrorists sought to replace the notoriety of their predecessors with an appearance of legitimacy. This was a means of survival rather than an ideological shift. By transforming its image as a violent group into that of a provider of charitable services or a legitimate political player, a terrorist group

¹ See Walter Laqueur, ed., *Voices of Terror* (Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, 2004), especially Bakunin, "Revolution, Terrorism, Banditry"; Sergey Nechaev, "Catechism of the Revolutionist"; Nikolai Morozov, "The Terrorist Struggle"; Pyotr Kropotkin, "The Spirit of Revolt"; and John Most, "Advice for Terrorists."

² See, for example, Tristram Korten, "[Our Hero the Drug Dealer](#)," *The Miami New Times News*, Apr. 23, 1998.

the terror group free up money for arms or violent undertakings. Any state that criminalizes a terrorist organization's militant wing but allows its charitable wing to continue unfettered or negotiates with its political wing merely keeps the conflict alive by perpetuating the scam.

Sinn Féin's Original "Political Wing"

Irish nationalism had existed for centuries before Arthur Griffith founded Sinn Féin in 1905 as a political party. Claiming to seek compromise through diplomacy, Sinn Féin became the self-styled political wing of the resistance while the violent, terroristic work was carried out by a series of militias (the Irish Republican Army [IRA], the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the Real Irish Republican Army). Whereas these militias insisted upon a no-compromise approach to a complete break with Britain, Sinn Féin took a less rigid public stance. Sinn Féin and the militias eventually agreed on what Brendan O'Brien called the "long war strategy" whereby the "IRA command structure and its illegal arsenal remained intact, waiting to see if 'politics' would deliver."³ But without the threat of violence from unrepentant militarists, no British government would have taken Sinn Féin seriously as a genuine political actor. Sinn Féin was little more than a front for the IRA with a great deal of fluidity between their membership; IRA commander Martin McGuinness, for example, became Sinn Féin's chief negotiator with the British government in the 1990s.

When it was expedient to do so, Sinn Féin claimed that it was trying to rein in those among the resistance it euphemistically called "activists" or "volunteers." But whenever Sinn Féin members who were not IRA members tried

³ Brendan O'Brien, *The Long War: The IRA and Sinn Féin*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993, 1999), p. 13.



Britain's Queen Elizabeth beams at Martin McGuinness (left)—the "Butcher of Bogside"—a former leader of the Irish Republican Army, the group responsible for the murder of her cousin Lord Mountbatten in 1979. McGuinness and Gerry Adams of the IRA/ Sinn Féin partnership perfected the bait and switch whereby the West negotiates with terrorists pretending to be politicians. Their example has served as a model for groups throughout the Middle East.

to dictate tactics, the limits of their power became clear:

"I'd have to say the army rules the roost," said one involved, seasoned observer. "The IRA people," he said, "were very conscious that an integral part of the struggle was propaganda and politics. So the long war strategy needed Sinn Féin. But if there was a settlement the army didn't like, Sinn Féin would be pushed aside."⁴

The IRA's long war strategy proved to be very effective. During the Bill Clinton presidency, Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams was among the most frequent foreign "diplomats" admitted to the White House (after arch-terrorist Yasser Arafat) and was granted a seat at the table when the Good Friday agreement of 1998 was negotiated. But after the 9/11 terror attacks,

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

the George W. Bush administration gave Sinn Féin and Adams the cold shoulder, joined surprisingly by Sen. Ted Kennedy (Democrat, Mass.),⁵ who had come to regret his earlier support for the group. By 2005, Ireland's justice minister Michael McDowell had publicly named Adams and McGuinness as members of the IRA's Army Council,⁶ and in 2007, Bertie Ahern, former prime minister of Ireland, put it more bluntly when he declared that Sinn Féin and the IRA were "both sides of the same coin."⁷

And yet, to those desperate for an end to violence, the prospect of a moderate political wing with which to negotiate continues to offer hope, throwing a lifeline to the terrorist organization it does not deserve. In June 2012, Britain's Queen Elizabeth shook the hand of Martin McGuinness—the "Butcher of Bogside"⁸—a former leader of the Irish Republican Army, the organization that was responsible for the murder of her cousin Lord Mountbatten in 1979.⁹ McGuinness and Adams have perfected the swindle whereby the West negotiates with terrorists pretending to be politicians, and their example has served as a model for other groups throughout the Middle East.

The Muslim Brotherhood's "Charitable Wing"

While Sinn Féin and the IRA were founded separately and only later formed their symbiotic relationship, Hassan al-Banna

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originally founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 as an umbrella organization with units devoted to politics (Islamism and the restoration of the

caliphate) and to charity (mostly focused on poor Egyptian boys). Only later, in 1940, did a militant wing appear. Drawing recruits from his version of the Boy Scouts, Banna used graduates of the Brotherhood's "Rover Scouts" to make up the core of an elite vanguard known as the Apparatus or the Special or Secret Apparatus (al-Jihaz or al-Tanzim al-Khass, al-Jihaz as-Sirri) willing to kill for the cause.¹⁰ Still later, in 1944, Banna launched a medical wing that operated clinics and pharmacies, and in 1945, founded the Muslim Sisters, which ran a girls' school.

As a result of its assassination of Egyptian prime minister Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi on December 28, 1948, the Brotherhood was forced to go underground although its charities, hospitals, schools, social clubs, and youth groups remained intact for a time and continued to provide shelter, support and, most importantly, new recruits to the cause. After an attempt on President Gamal Abdel Nasser's life in 1954, however, all known Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Egypt were rounded up and either executed or imprisoned. The organization might have withered to nothingness had it not been for Zaynab Ghazali's Muslim Women's Association (Jama'at as-Sayyidat al-Muslimat), which had pledged allegiance to the Muslim Brotherhood and managed to provide

food, medical care, and other support to ... help reconstitute the organization, serving as a liaison among dispersed members and

⁵ *The New York Times*, [Mar. 15, 2005](#); *The Washington Post*, [Mar. 17, 2005](#).

⁶ Jim Allister, "[Sinn Fein must prove it supports the rule of law](#)," *The Belfast Telegraph*, Jan. 9, 2007.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ John Simpson, "[Martin McGuinness](#): Butcher of Bogside to brave statesman," BBC, June 27, 2012.

⁹ *The New York Times*, [June 27, 2012](#).

¹⁰ Gudrun Kramer, *Hasan al-Banna* (Oxford: One World, 2010), pp. 70-5; Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 206.

sympathizers, and conducting seminars on Islam with activists in her home.¹¹

Over the next six decades, the legal status of the Brotherhood in Egypt seesawed between outright banning, to sporadic, intense repression, to a begrudging but limited acceptance, to a brief spell in power under Mohamed Mursi's presidency. The organization has regularly franchised student, charitable, and even media wings throughout its sphere of influence while successfully camouflaging its relationship to these organizations.¹² From the beginning, its "method was to employ flexibility [*muruna*] and concealment [*taqiya* or *kitman*] in order to spread Islam,"¹³ especially in the West, and this wing charade was perpetuated either covertly or openly in every country to which the Brotherhood spread. In Jordan, for instance, the Muslim Brotherhood is a legal group that participates in politics through its "political wing," the Islamic Action Front, while its connections to Hamas account for its militant



Physicians in a Muslim Brotherhood "field hospital" treat injured demonstrators in Egypt, 2013. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 as an organization devoted to politics and to charity. In 1940, a militant wing was formed. In 1944, the Brotherhood launched a medical wing, and in 1945, founded the Muslim Sisters, which ran a girls' school.

wing.¹⁴ The Pakistani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, itself a Brotherhood offshoot, retains a subsidiary called Jamaat-ud Dawa (JuD) as its charitable wing. Alongside supplying medical relief and establishing emergency clinics, JuD publishes a decidedly political weekly (*Jarrar*) and runs more than three hundred seminars inculcating the Brotherhood's Islamist message.¹⁵

In the aftermath of 9/11, some of the Brotherhood's secretive doings and strategic imperatives have begun to be uncovered by U.S. and European authorities. A document dated December 1, 1982, which came to be known as "The Project" was discovered in a 2001 raid on the home of Youssef Nada, the director of the at-Taqwa Bank of Lugano, Switzerland. In it,

¹¹ "Zaynab al-Ghazali, 1917-2005," in Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, eds., *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 275-82; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, Jon Rothschild, trans. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 29-30.

¹² Alyssa A. Lappen, "The Muslim Brotherhood in North America," in Barry Rubin, ed., *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 162.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁴ Barry Rubin, "Comparing Three Muslim Brotherhoods," in Rubin, ed., *The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, pp. 10-13.

¹⁵ Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Special Dispatch 5647, [Feb. 16, 2014](#).

Muslims worldwide are exhorted to set up *dawa* (proselytization) groups in the form of charities and other religious, cultural, and political organizations, which can operate out in the open expressly for the purpose of providing cover for violent jihad.¹⁶

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“civilizational jihad.”**

“An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America” dated May 19, 1991, is another document that came to light that elaborates on the concept of wings, arms, and branches in the Brotherhood. Written by Muhammad Akram (a senior official of both the Brotherhood and Hamas) it calls for the destruction of American society through “civilizational jihad” modeled on the actions of the prophet Muhammad:

our prophet Muhammad ... placed the foundation for the first civilized organization, which is the mosque, which truly became “the comprehensive organization.” And this was done by the pioneer of contemporary Islamic *dawa*, Imam martyr Hasan Banna ... when he and his brothers felt the need to “re-establish” Islam and its movement anew, leading him to establish organizations with all their kinds: economic, social, media, scouting, professional, and even the military ones.¹⁷

Akram concluded that America was “a country which understands no language other than the language of the organizations, and one which does not respect or give weight to any

group without effective, functional and strong organizations” and cited as tools for the overall objective of overthrowing the United States a list of

twenty-nine Brotherhood organizations including the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Students Association, the Islamic Circle of North America, the Muslim American Society, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Occupied Land Fund (aka Holy Land Foundation).¹⁸

Although these documents and their implications are in the public domain and were widely reported on in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, over time these wings have been treated by reporters and pundits as moderate organizations largely because they have not been involved in acts of violence. The Muslim Brotherhood itself received a tremendous boost to mainstream acceptance by none other than U.S. president Barack Obama who pushed to have its leadership invited to his now-infamous Cairo speech of June 4, 2009. The Obama administration has not only supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and abroad but has also served the group’s interests domestically, treating the organization as a moderate ally, even hiring Brotherhood activists for important posts influencing foreign policy.¹⁹ In the latest wrinkle to this stratagem, many of the original twenty-nine front groups listed in the explanatory memorandum have coalesced into an American Muslim Brotherhood political PAC called the U.S. Council of Muslim Organizations,²⁰ in essence becoming the

¹⁸ [Ibid.](#)

¹⁹ See, for example, John Rossomando, “Egyptian Magazine: [Muslim Brotherhood Infiltrates Obama Administration.](#)” Investigative Project on Terrorism, Jan. 3, 2013; *The Washington Times*, [June 3, 2013.](#)

²⁰ “[Muslim Brotherhood Now Has Its Own U.S. Political Party.](#)” *Investor’s Business Daily* (Los Angeles), Apr. 2, 2014.

¹⁶ “[The Muslim Brotherhood ‘Project’ \(continued\).](#)” Dec. 1, 1982, in *Front Page Magazine*, May 11, 2006.

¹⁷ Mohamed Akram, “[An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Brotherhood in North America.](#)” May 19, 1991, The Investigative Project for Terrorism archives.



Yasser Arafat (left) of the Fatah terror group meets with Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. In 1976, the dictator urged Arafat to feign small concessions in order to reap financial rewards from the West. “Brother, Arafat, how about pretending to break with terrorism? The West would love it.” Arafat was an apt pupil.

political wing of the charitable wing of a terrorist organization.

Palestinian Terror Groups

Yasser Arafat, a founding member of the Fatah terror group and subsequent chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), was perhaps the consummate master in the art of terror dissembling. Under his leadership, a ragtag group of saboteurs morphed into a national liberation movement, which in turn became a government-in-exile, finally to be transformed into an oppressive, kleptocratic regime in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, courted by politicians the world over. Arafat ultimately convinced the world that the PLO was a political party, only loosely affiliated with a series of autonomous terrorist organizations. But in fact, neither the PLO nor Fatah, its foremost constituent organization, have ever renounced violence as asserted by the 1968 Palestinian National Charter, which Arafat pledged to revise as part of the Oslo “peace process” but never did, and which was reaffirmed by Fatah’s sixth general congress as

late as August 2009: “Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine. This it is the overall strategy, not merely a tactical phase.”²¹

Ion Pacepa, former Romanian spy chief, recounts how his former boss, dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, urged Arafat to feign small concessions in order to reap financial rewards from the West: “How about pretending to break with terrorism?” Ceausescu reasoned. “The West would love it.”²² Arafat initially balked, but the Romanian dictator assured him that no real transformation was necessary:

Nothing serious, only a few cosmetic changes. Like transforming the PLO into a Palestinian government-in-exile ... In the shadow of your government-in-exile, you can keep as many operational groups as you want as long as they are not publicly connected with your name. They could mount endless operations all around the world while your name and your “government” would remain pristine and unspoiled, ready for negotiations and further recognition.²³

Arafat took up Ceausescu’s advice with a vengeance, and this deception culminated in the signing of the Oslo accords, which enabled the PLO to establish control over the Palestinian population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (via its dominated Palestinian Authority, [PA])

²¹ [“The Palestinian National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council July 1-17, 1968.”](#) art. 9, Yale Law School, Avalon Project; “Fatah’s Sixth General Conference Resolutions,” MEMRI, Aug. 13, 2009.

²² Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Red Horizons: Chronicles of a Communist Spy Chief* (New York: Kampmann and Co., 1987), p. 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

without effectively shedding its commitment to Israel's destruction.

When the PLO/PA's rivals in terror, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), engaged in suicide bombings, Arafat found himself forced to condemn their violence or risk appearing diplomatically irrelevant. But in order to continue to be relevant on the Palestinian street and to continue his violent campaign against Israel, his next move was to sprout a new and more militant wing called Tanzim, which itself sprouted yet another even more violent wing, the al-Aqsa Brigades (later called the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades), which would become one of the deadliest suicide bombing groups of the Oslo era.²⁴

Arafat's bait-and-switch tactics can be contrasted with those of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, founded in 1980 strictly on terroristic principles and initially with no pretense of nonviolent charitable or political aspirations. The PIJ's operating principles reflected the opposition of its founders (Fathi Shiqaqi, Abdel Aziz Odeh, and Bashir Musa) to "the gradualism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the PLO's strategy of 'occupation management.'"²⁵ But the group also soon decided to use Western gullibility to further its goals. In 1988, Sami Arian, a tenured professor at the University of South Florida (USF), founded the Islamic Committee for Palestine (ICP) along with the World and Islamic Studies Enterprise (WISE) on the university's Tampa campus. ICP itself was an outgrowth of the Islamic Concern Project ostensibly dedicated to "helping the poor, the refugees, the displaced, the orphans,

The FBI and U.S. Immigration Service exposed several U.S. academic and charitable groups as terror front groups.

the sick, the handicapped and the homeless" while WISE purported to be a think-tank affiliated with USF's Committee for Middle East Studies. By

1995, the FBI and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) exposed these as academic and charitable front groups and shut them down; the investigation found, among other incriminating evidence, a letter soliciting a rich Kuwaiti for funds so that suicide bombings and the "jihad effort in Palestine" could continue.²⁶

Charity Spawns Hezbollah

While the Iranian-created terror group Hezbollah was born on the ruins of the Lebanese civil war (1975-90), its origins go back to a group of Shiite clerics educated in Najaf, Iraq, in the 1950s and 1960s who relocated to Lebanon and "wove a clandestine network that became known as Hizb al-Dawa—the 'Party of the Calling.'"²⁷ One of those clerics, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935-2010) was at the center of a series of charitable organizations which morphed into Hezbollah.

Fadlallah was a mesmerizing sermonizer alert to the suffering of the disenfranchised Shiite community of Beirut but was perhaps an even better "community organizer." He established social and cultural associations including clinics, youth clubs, and schools, and as the Lebanese civil war began to take its humanitarian toll, created the Mabarrat Charitable Association. Out of this organization

²⁴ Efraim Karsh, *Arafat's War* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), pp. 213-35.

²⁵ Roxanne L. Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, introduction to "Hamas 1987" in *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought*, p. 7.

²⁶ Steven Emerson, *Jihad Incorporated* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2006) p. 242.

²⁷ Martin Kramer, "The Oracle of Hizbullah" in R. Scott Appleby, ed., *Spokesmen for the Despised* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 89.

grew a number of wings including the benign-sounding Muslim Student Union and a militant arm, which came to be known as Hezbollah.

Though Fadlallah insisted until the day he died that the Dawa party and Hezbollah were not connected and that he was not a member of Hezbollah, few scholars believe him. An exception is Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, who vehemently denies a Fadlallah-Hezbollah connection, but then devotes much of her work to whitewashing Hezbollah's terrorist activities, portraying it as a group of "guerilla fighters who were practicing their legitimate right to resist a foreign occupation."²⁸ Few scholars deny the connections between Fadlallah and Hezbollah, and analyst Matthew Levitt has shown how the Dawa party is "a key constituent element within Hezbollah" providing it with new members such as terrorism mastermind Imad Mughniyeh, who joined Fadlallah's Muslim Student Union, itself described as a branch of Fadlallah's Dawa Party.²⁹ Fadlallah also seems to have taken lessons from the Sinn Féin-IRA playbook as



Cleric Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah organized a series of clinics, youth clubs, schools, and orphanages in Lebanon and, later, the Mabarrat Charitable Association. One of the association's wings eventually became Hezbollah. The group's ability to conduct terrorist attacks has always been dependent upon its ability to undertake "charitable work."

seen by his willingness to act as a supposedly neutral intermediary between Hezbollah and Western governments seeking the return of their citizens taken hostage by the group.

Hezbollah's success can be attributed to its domination of all levels of Shiite society. Its ability to conduct terrorist attacks has always been dependent upon its ability to conduct "charitable work." Hezbollah outperformed its rival Lebanese militia AMAL by controlling the world they shared on

three levels: the *ideological-religious*, with the aim of mobilizing society and incorporating into it motifs such as religious activism, resolve, and willingness for personal sacrifice for the sake of the whole; the *social*, with the aim of abolishing ethnic discrimination and social injustice and improving the living conditions of the Shiite population; and the *military*, with the aim of

²⁸ Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah, Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 3.

²⁹ Matthew Levitt, *Hezbollah* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013), pp. 22-48; Kramer, "The Oracle of Hizbullah," p. 85; Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), chap. 2, "The Founding of Hezbollah"; Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God from Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 39, 50; Jamal Sankari, *Fadlallah, The Making of a Radical Shi'ite Leader* (London: Saqi Books, 2005), p. 15.

bringing about the expulsion of all foreigners.³⁰

But rather than recognizing the cohesion of Hezbollah's interests and how such interests enabled the organization to flourish, Western journalists, academics, and politicians chose to apply the wing metaphor and ignore how its activities were all interconnected. What is particularly galling is that a number of Hezbollah leaders have been surprisingly open about the con game they are running. Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's "deputy secretary-general," has denied that there are distinct wings to Hezbollah and admitted that the "same leadership that directs the parliamentary and government work also leads jihad actions."³¹ Another Hezbollah member (and former Lebanese member of parliament), Ismail Sukariyya, has stated publicly that "it is impossible to separate the political [arm] from the military one."³²

In spite of these affirmations of the unity among Hezbollah's parts, the West is still unwilling to give up on the wing construct. After Bulgarian police and Interpol proved Hezbollah's culpability for a July 2012 bombing that killed five Israelis and one Bulgarian, the European Union (EU) finally decided to designate Hezbollah a terrorist organization—only to "clarify" that the "militant wing" alone would be so designated.³³ The decision was a deadly farce, for money sent to the charitable or political wing of Hezbollah—or any other terrorist organization for that matter—inevitably finds its way to the militant wing. At least their fellow Arabs understand: The Saudi press called such a distinction "an insult to people's intelligence"³⁴

while the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) named Hezbollah a terrorist organization, opening up the possibility of further sanctions against the group.



Hamas, founded by Ahmad Yasin, began as a charity, operating schools and clinics, and grew into a radical Islamic movement. Reporters, academics, and Western politicians speak of its wings as distinct, separate units. But Yassin declared: "We cannot separate the wing from the body. If we do so, the body will not be able to fly. Hamas is one body."

Hamas

In 1973, Ahmad Yasin, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood living in Gaza, established the Islamic Center (al-Mujamma al-Islami), ostensibly to operate schools and clinics. Over the next decade, this Islamist organization, which eventually emerged as Hamas (acronym for Harakat al-Muqawamma al-Islamiya—the Islamic Resistance Movement), grew steadily at the PLO's expense:

While the welfare and charity arms of Israel's public enemy number one, the PLO, were compelled to remain clandestine in Gaza and the West Bank throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Mujamma was able to operate openly and freely. From its legally registered offices in Gaza, it set up kindergartens charging reduced fees and offered

³⁰ Azani, *Hezbollah*, p. 63. Italics in original.

³¹ European Jewish Press (Brussels), [May 22, 2013](#).

³² MEMRI Special Dispatch 5347, [July 24, 2013](#).

³³ *The Washington Post*, [July 22, 2013](#).

³⁴ MEMRI Special Dispatch 5401, [Aug. 9, 2013](#).

free food and clothing donations. It established clinics offering primary health care and free or subsidized medicines.³⁵

After proclaiming its existence to the world on December 14, 1987, in August 1988, Hamas issued its covenant, which described the nascent organization as “a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine.”³⁶ Hamas itself purports to have three separate branches: a political wing, which plays the Sinn Féin role, dealing with governments and nongovernmental organizations (though it is far less interested in feigning moderation than Sinn Féin was); a military wing, the Qassam Brigades, named after a Syrian Islamist killed by the British army in Palestine in November 1935; and the social wing, or the *dawa* (proselytism) infrastructure—a complex socio-political operation geared to widening Hamas’s popular base by economically supporting ordinary Palestinians, rather than its followers alone, while exposing them to its values and jihadist ideology and creating widespread financial dependency on the assistance it provides.

The press, most academics, and virtually all Western politicians accept the fraudulent separation premise, treating members of the political wing as diplomats, peace partners, or subjects for interviews rather than murderers or collaborators in murder. But again, this is an illusion, deployed to hoodwink gullible Westerners into ignoring “the myriad ways in which virtually every Hamas political and social activity is inextricably bound up with its terrorist mission.”³⁷ Like the Muslim

Brotherhood, Hamas is structured in a strict hierarchical fashion with the political leadership overseeing all fields of activities, setting the movement’s goals and strategy, and delegating responsibility for their implementation to the various bodies and organs. Both Hamas’s founder, Yasin, and his immediate successor, Abdul Aziz Rantisi, admitted as much, with Yasin stating in 1998: “We cannot separate the wing from the body. If we do so, the body will not be able to fly. Hamas is one body.”³⁸ Rantisi reiterated in 2001 that

Hamas’ political wing determines the overall policy for the movement [and the] military wing operates at the pleasure of the political bureau, and is subordinate to it.³⁹

This, however, did not prevent former president Jimmy Carter from praising Hamas leader Khaled Mishal as someone who is “strongly in favor of the peace process,”⁴⁰ a sentiment echoed by British Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn.⁴¹

Understanding the Metaphor

Any fight against a terrorist organization is a propaganda war as much as it is a legal case or a military engagement. Nation-states are often slow to acknowledge (let alone react to) words and ideas deployed as tactical weapons. The first step in fighting any tactic is understanding it, and yet there is scant rhetorical analysis of the terms and few attempts to tease out meanings through apparent etymologies.

For instance, why has “wing” emerged as the preferred term in Western discourse?

³⁵ Beverly Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas, Islamic Resistance Movement* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 47.

³⁶ “[The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement](#),” Aug. 18, 1988, art. 2, Yale Law School, The Avalon Project.

³⁷ Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 33.

³⁸ Reuters, May 27, 1998.

³⁹ Levitt, *Hamas*, p. 39.

⁴⁰ *Times of Israel* (Jerusalem), [May 2, 2015](#).

⁴¹ *The Telegraph* (London), [July 13, 2015](#).

Why not refer to the counterfeit segments as “divisions” or “branches” or even the United Nations’ preferred term, “organs”? Though these terms are sometimes used, each connotes a kind of unity that terrorists seek to conceal: “Division” is too corporate, and “branch,” a tree metaphor, suggests natural outgrowth. The goal is to create an illusion of separation, and these terms simply do not work. Likewise, the seldom-used terms “organ” and “arm” suggest a kind of unity from which there is no escape. In a witty 2005 *Washington Times* column, Tony Blankly argued insightfully that the militant and political arms of the IRA and Hezbollah were not separate entities at all. He derided the

By treating the wings of a terrorist group as separate entities, journalists, analysts, and politicians are abetting these groups.

flies with—could the bird fly without wings?” But such a reading of the metaphor is problematic since many terrorist groups have more than two wings

and since, like arms or branches, it implies an organic unity that terrorists want to obscure.

Another option is to consider the term’s meaning in military jargon: “Either of the two divisions (right wing, left wing) on each side of the main body or centre of an army or fleet in battle array” or “each of the two divisions of a regiment of an air force.” But this does not shroud the militaristic nature of the organizations; rather, it does the opposite. Therefore, the most logical reading of the term is to consider it an architectural metaphor, with the “resistance” as a large building and wing denoting a “subordinate part of a building on one side of the main or central part.” This usage insinuates the difficulty for those, say, at the top floor of the building (the political wing) to follow and control the activities of those at the basement (the militant wing), and it likens the resistance to an amorphous, unnamed body caught in the middle. It also portrays the terrorist organization as something all Westerners can relate to: a giant bureaucracy with inevitable glitches and miles of frustrating red tape.

Repeated and thoughtless use of the term reinforces the deception and increases the likelihood of its success. By accepting the premise of the metaphor and treating the wings of a terrorist group as separate entities, journalists, analysts, and politicians are in fact abetting these groups. Their reasons for doing so vary. A government wishing to preserve the illusion that it does not negotiate with terrorists while doing precisely that may welcome a bogus political wing as a negotiating partner. Journalists who identify more closely with terrorists than with their victims, wishing to avoid the term “terrorist” at all costs, have been

gorgeous vision of dealing separately with the political and military arms of a terrorist organization—in the expectation that the political arm will grow while the military arm will wither. Unfortunately both arms are connected to the same body, which is governed by the same brain. And it is the brain of a killer.⁴²

So the term “wing” has become the mainstay trope camouflaging nearly every significant terrorist organization’s true structural integrity. But its meaning is not unambiguous. One option is to see the metaphor as implying the anatomy of a bird or the parts of an airplane; thus a wing in this usage denotes a “lateral part or appendage.”⁴³ The Hamas covenant suggests this possibility toward the end of Article 27 where it distinguishes between Hamas and the “secularist” PLO: “One’s cousin is the wing one

⁴² “[Talking with terrorists](#),” *The Washington Times*, Mar. 15, 2005.

⁴³ All definitions are quoted from *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

more than willing to play along with the ruse:⁴⁴ Whenever a new wing of a group is discovered to be engaged in terrorism, or too closely-related to the main terrorist power structure, it sprouts a new wing that distances itself from the parent wing until its true nature is also discovered after which it sprouts another new wing. The entire process is thus potentially unending.

A government wishing to preserve the illusion that it does not negotiate with terrorists may welcome a bogus political wing partner.

that organization's over-all terrorist objectives.⁴⁶

In practical terms, just as the Treasury Department's forensic accountants track down shell companies set up by criminal organizations and then bring in law enforcement to break up the gangs, so Western nations must deal with the shell charitable organizations that terrorist groups routinely set up to hide and then transfer resources to their militant wings.

Conclusion

Rather than treating terror groups' wings as separate parts of a building with discrete and independent functions, governments should take the metaphor but subvert it. The first step would be to make clear that all wings of a terrorist group will be considered parts of the same building, hidden behind a facade—an elaborate and decorative but false front of a building that disguises its true shape. Governments can then proceed by inflicting legal damage on one part of the structure that will invariably weaken the entire edifice.

In the United States at least, the tools for inflicting such damage are available in two "material support" statutes enacted in 1994 and 1996.⁴⁵ Acting U.S. Attorney James T. Jacks noted, following the conviction of the Holy Land Foundation trial defendants in 2009, that the statutes recognize

that money is fungible, and that money in the hands of a terrorist organization—even for so called charitable purposes—supports

The Canadian government seemed to be taking just the right steps when it revoked the legal charity status of the Canada Development Foundation (DF) of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) but still fell into the trap posed by terrorist con artists. The ISNA, one of the original twenty-nine Muslim Brotherhood front groups listed in the Brotherhood's 1991 explanatory memorandum, had established a Canadian branch which, in turn, set up a separate charitable wing called the ISNA Development Foundation. The Development Foundation was found to have sent money to the Pakistani Relief Organization for Kashmiri Muslims with its own strong ties⁴⁷ to the Islamist group Jama'at-e-Islami,⁴⁸ which has its

⁴⁴ *Honest Reporting*, [Apr. 10](#), [Apr. 30, 2013](#).

⁴⁵ The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, 18 U.S.C. § 2339A; The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act § 2339B.

⁴⁶ "[Federal Judge Hands Down Sentences in Holy Land Foundation Case](#)," U.S. Justice Department, Office of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C., May 27, 2009. Jacks also calls the HLF "the chief fundraising arm for the Palestine Committee in the US created by the Muslim Brotherhood to support Hamas."

⁴⁷ Animesh Roul, "Indian Investigations Reveal Funding System for [Promoting Jihad in Kashmir](#)," *Terrorism Monitor*, Jamestown Foundation, Washington, D.C., Apr. 4, 2014.

⁴⁸ MEMRI Special Dispatch No. [5564](#), Dec. 13, 2013.

own militant wing, Hizbul Mujahideen.⁴⁹ But while the Canadian Revenue Agency shut down the so-called Development Foundation, it has not thus far revoked the charity status from the parent group, ISNA Canada, leaving it free to launch another wing if it so chooses.⁵⁰

As illustrated by much of the West's response to some of Israel's military actions during Operation Protective Edge in 2014, the wing charade poses serious diplomatic and public relations problems for targeted states. When Israel was forced to retaliate against missile launchers and weapons caches secreted in Gazan schools and mosques, there was an immediate uproar from many Western capitals. "Civilized" nations would not condone military tactics turned on charities, hospitals, and orphanages, despite evidence that they were being used to target Israel's citizens and notwithstanding repeated Israeli warnings to remove all civilians from these hot zones.

This ruse must be challenged and defeated. Charities affiliated with terrorist groups must not be treated as genuine aid organizations. In the United States, they should not be granted 501(c) status and allowed to operate freely, thereby turning donations into detonations. This will be a difficult task for Western nations, hobbled by their tendency to treat all charity and philanthropy as intrinsically valuable and untouchable.

Similarly, governments with a history of treating the political wings of terrorist organizations as legitimate state actors will find it difficult to reverse course although they must. The example of Sri Lanka and its fight against

Charities affiliated with terrorist groups must not be allowed to turn donations into detonations.

the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is instructive here. In addition to a navy, air force, and ground forces, as well as

suicide squadrons, the LTTE maintained a political wing. Following the election of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005, a new Sri Lankan offensive against the rebels commenced, culminating in the deliberate targeting and killing of the head of this political wing, S.P. Thamilchelvam.⁵¹ Despite worldwide condemnation, the Sri Lankan government did what it needed to cut off the head of this particular hydra, defying the wishes of the international community and fighting back with overwhelming, rather than merely proportionate force. So did Egyptian minister-of-defense-turned-president Abdel Fattah Sisi by toppling the Muslim Brotherhood government, then outlawing the movement as a terrorist organization despite the Obama administration's harsh response to this move.⁵² Yet even Sisi stopped short of following his policy to its logical conclusion by proclaiming Hamas's military wing—but not the organization itself—a terrorist organization.⁵³

Perhaps the most notorious terror group currently operating, the Islamic State, aka ISIS, has taken on the trappings of an actual state by setting up ruling institutions, selling oil from the territory it captured, and even minting its own currency.⁵⁴ It has also undertaken a propaganda campaign, portraying itself as the caretaker of children stricken with cancer⁵⁵ and, like

49 "[Hizb-ul-Mujahideen \(HM\)](#)," Global Security, Alexandria, Va., accessed Apr. 24, 2016; "[Hizb-ul-Mujahideen](#)," Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi, accessed Apr. 24, 2016.

50 *Mississauga News* (Ont.), [Sept. 24, 2013](#).

51 Stephen Hopgood, "Tamil Tigers, 1987-2002," in Diego Gambetta, ed., *Making Sense of Suicide Missions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.74.

52 *BBC News*, "[Profile: Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood](#)," Dec. 25, 2013.

53 Reuters, [Jan. 31, 2015](#).

54 CNN, [Nov. 14, 2014](#).

55 *Jihadism and Terrorism Threat Monitor*, MEMRI, [Aug. 12, 2014](#).

Hezbollah, opening its own schools.⁵⁶ Whether the West will be gulled by this, should ISIS also tone down its anti-Western rhetoric and actions, remains to be seen.

Columnist Tony Blankley pointed out that both Al Capone and the Nazis engaged in charitable services for the poor of Chicago and Germany respectively. He wrote, “Any political party that has its own private army is inherently not a democratic institution. Nor is it likely to evolve into one.”⁵⁷

Taking this advice one step further, the civilized world should agree that any entity calling itself the nonviolent social, charitable, or political wing of a terrorist group should be treated exactly as its militant wing is treated.

Terrorists use the term “wing” as a rhetorical ploy to divert attention from their crimes and to help finance their violence. Though the ploy is ubiquitous, and the premise of separation is widely accepted, all evidence indicates that the wings of a terrorist group are never separate. Rather, like Odysseus’s horse, they disguise the warriors within. Western governments should not repeat the Trojans’ mistake.

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⁵⁶ MEMRI Special Dispatch 5439, [Sept. 9, 2013](#).

⁵⁷ *The Washington Times*, [Mar. 15, 2005](#).