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Palestinian Tribes, Clans, and Notable Families

by Glenn E. Robinson

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Editor's Note: In recognition of the important (and largely unanticipated) role Iraqi tribes played during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, the USG brought a number of country experts to Washington in July 2008 to comment on the significance of tribes, clans and other extended familial units in the Middle East. The following is the paper presented at that conference by Glenn E. Robinson on Palestinian case.

Introduction

Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is characterized by three types of clan-like familial structures: tribes, clans, and notable families. While all three share similar extended familial attributes, behavioral obligations (especially on males), informal networks, and honor-shame cultural systems, they are also quite distinct in their origins and continuing importance.

Tribes

Of the three clan-like structures in Palestinian society, actual tribes are the least politically and socially important. Here, tribes refer to descendents of nomadic and semi-nomadic Bedouin populations. Only a tiny handful of Palestinian tribes are currently still semi-nomadic. About 15 percent of the Palestinian population is of tribal origin—25 percent in the Gaza Strip, much less in the West Bank—with the large majority of the Palestinian population derived from sedentary (peasant) roots. Even those estimates are likely on the high side.

Detribalization of Palestinians has occurred largely because of the loss of the nomadic lifestyle, which itself is both the normal product of modernization and a result of the hyper concern over property, property rights, and property lines that has characterized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The legal and physical ability of Bedouin tribes to move about freely in Palestine has essentially ended, as have their ability to shepherd livestock freely. Sedentarization and the loss of the traditional division of labor have made tribal affiliation less important. In addition, Palestinian Bedouin populations are among the economically most deprived groups in the region, further diminishing their political clout.

While tribes are not nearly as politically or economically important in Palestine as they are throughout the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Jordan and Syria, tribal identity for that impoverished group remains strong. Patterns of marriage, the single most important measure of group identity, are still largely dictated by tribal rules.

Tribes in Gaza are organized into six tribal confederations, or *saffs*, with each confederation made up of at least a dozen individual tribes (*asha'ira*). The tribal confederations in Gaza are the Hayawat, Tarabeen, Tayaha, Ijbara, Azazma, and Jahalin. Tribes in the West Bank are more geographically isolated, and are based primarily in the hill country to the east of Hebron. There are scatterings of small tribes east of Jerusalem and on the western flank of the Jordan Valley as well. Not coincidentally, tribes in the West Bank are located in territory that has historically not been suitable for agricultural production.

Clans

The clan structure in Palestine is far more consequential than the Bedouin tribes, and has become even more important since the breakdown of the Palestinian Authority structures during the second uprising, or *intifadat al-Aqsa*, beginning in 2000. A clan, or *hamula* (plural: *hama'il*), will consist of at least several extended families (*a'ila*) claiming a shared ancestry, and linked through the father's male line. Each extended family will generally include male first and second cousins, the women they marry, and the children of that union. Female children who marry outside of the *hamula* (and their children) then belong to the other *hamula*. Their *nasab*, or "relationship in law", will bind them to a new *hamula*.

While clans will always claim to have a common male ancestor and are thus linked by blood, it is often a fictitious claim, and the boundaries of inclusion are historically more fluid than one might otherwise expect. Palestinian dispossession and dispersal has made the fluidity of clan inclusion greater than elsewhere in the Arab world, largely out of necessity. Refugee camps have been known to recreate clan identity and ties based on the village of origin rather than on actual familial ties. Individual households (*bayt*) or families (*a'ila*) from clans that have been geographically dispersed or otherwise marginalized will often attempt to latch on to a more powerful local clan, inventing stories about a shared ancestry. If it suits the interests of the clan to absorb this new family, it will do so, and adjust the family tree accordingly. With time, the nature of the actual merger is forgotten, although the new family will likely remain on the margins of the clan for a period.

Clans have served several historical functions that have contributed to their survival in the modern period. First, clans are a source of individual and family security. Outsiders will think twice before attacking a member of a clan, particularly a powerful *hamula*, knowing that revenge (*tha'ir*) will be taken. Where states are strong and can reliably protect citizens, clans weaken; where states are weak, clans are strong. This has become the central reason why Palestinian clans have flourished both under Israeli occupation and under conditions of PA breakdown.

Second, clans have historically been the organizing tool for cultivating shared lands (*mush'a* lands). Hamulas are specifically peasant-based, and peasant clans would share cultivation responsibilities for most all fertile lands in Palestine (except for small private, or *mulk*, plots, and in some cases *miri*, or state lands). The prominence of *mush'a* lands has diminished consistently since the adoption by the Ottoman Empire of the 1858 Land law Code, the growing legal recognition of private property under British and Jordanian rule, and, especially since 1981, Israel's expansive classification of state land in the West Bank for colonization purposes. Thus, an economic pillar for clan life has weakened.

The economic justification for clan organization has now shifted from shared cultivation of *mush'a* lands to shared financial wellbeing in desperate economic times. Numerous clans have, in recent years, established foundations, NGOs, or other institutional tools to jointly manage finances and investments across the *hamula*. Particularly in Gaza, such clan-based management and distribution of wealth has been essential to the survival of individual households where employment is scarce and savings often non-existent. Members of the clan living in the Diaspora contribute to these funds, in some cases in the tens of thousands of dollars.

A third continuing impetus for the strength of Palestinian clans besides security and economic rationales is social: clans provide an important source of spouses in a society where half of all marriages are to cousins, and more broadly, a trusted network for all social occasions.

The formal cement that ties together clan members is a *mithaq al-sharaf*, or code of honor, which is binding on all male members. The *mithaq* is often a formal written agreement, pages long, that ties together all the disparate families that constitute the *hamula*. They pledge not only their loyalty to each other, but agree that an attack (physical or honor based) on one member constitutes an attack on all members of the *hamula*. Given that Palestinian society shares the honor-shame social system common to Mediterranean countries, individual members cannot easily violate this code without dishonoring themselves and their families. It is a powerful social glue, especially in the absence of a functioning state that can provide public security. Absent such a state, the code of vendetta and revenge often becomes dominant.

A final note by way of introduction on clans: clans and clan leaders have considerable local power, but not national power. This is no Palestinian clan that by dint of its numbers and reputation can dominate and even largely impact national Palestinian politics. Clans become politically important in two major ways. First, as an institution—as the sum of their whole—clans can become politically powerful. Hamas is discovering that now in Gaza as it takes on clan politics. Hamas is far stronger than any one clan, but as all (or many) clans feel threatened by Hamas policies, they have tended to act in concert. Second, as noted below, when elections are structured by districts, clans can become centrally important in electing representatives in any one district. As the election law has now shifted to a national proportional representation, single district system, clans should become less important in legislative elections in the future.

Small clans will typically range in size from several dozen to a couple hundred male members, while the very largest clans may claim up to 1,000 male members.

Notable Families

The third clan-like grouping in Palestine in the urban elite notable family, a social formation typical throughout the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire. Many of the most well known and prominent Palestinian families come from this notable, or *a'yan*, social class: Husayni, Nashashibi, Dajani, Abd al-Hadi, Tuqan, Nabulsi, Khoury, Tamimi, Khatib, Ja'bari, Masri, Kan'an, Shaq'a, Barghouthi, Shawwa, Rayyes, and others. These are extended families that dominated Palestinian politics until the 1980s, and are still relatively prominent today.

Outside of Anatolia, the Ottoman state ruled its empire in an indirect manner. That is, Istanbul relied on local officials and prominent local families (who often became the local officials) in the Arab lands as intermediaries to the population to enforce Ottoman power, often using their own manner and judgment to do so. The autonomy of these local notables increased substantially in the nineteenth century as the Ottoman Porte afforded them more power and discretion, primarily linked to their ability to deliver increased tax revenues to the central government. Successful military officers, prominent members of the *'ulama*, and, increasingly, the emerging commercial elite all figured prominently in the making of notable families. Following adoption of the 1858 land law code, notable families also became significant landowners throughout Palestine and the *Bilad al-Sham*.

Just as the Ottomans relied on these notable families to ensure their rule, so did the British during the Mandate period. Indeed, tension among notable families reached a crescendo under British rule, made famous by the historic rivalry between the Husayni and Nashashibi families, the former characterized by their increasing hostility to the British, and the latter known for its cooperation with the Mandate authorities. The British were able to play the game of divide and

conquer, weakening Palestinian society, and giving a clear advantage to the emerging Zionist foothold in Palestine during the 1920s and 1930s.

Jordan and Egypt similarly used notable families as intermediaries to the Palestinian populations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively. Jordan essentially bolstered notable families as long as they did not engage in nationalist politics. Egypt relied on the Shawwa and Rayyes families in Gaza to help administer that territory. Town mayors, city councilman, and other prominent local officials in the West Bank and Gaza during the 1950s and 1960s almost always came from these patrician families.

Even during the first 15 years of Israeli rule, notable families maintained their privileged position, although they increasingly espoused a more nationalist line consistent with the growing power of the PLO in the 1970s. Israel undertook contradictory policies vis-à-vis the notable families in the 1980s (and beyond) that helped weaken their position in society. On the one hand, Israel still sought to organize the occupation indirectly, through dispersing patronage resources via the notables. On the other hand, other Israeli policies directly undermined the notable families. Foremost among those policies was the confiscation of lands for the settlement project in the West Bank, which expanded rapidly after 1981. Notable families had much of their lands confiscated, and lost the ability to control other village lands that they did not own but over which they had had considerable influence. The short-lived Village Leagues policy likewise undermined the position of the notable families by shifting resources to discredited rural second-tier elites.

Notable families were also undermined by social modernization, in particular the growing prominence of an educated middle class, or new political elite, that threw its weight squarely behind the PLO in the 1980s. The mobilization of Palestinian society by the new elite in the 1980s not only politically marginalized the notable families to a significant extent, but also brought about the first *intifada*, or uprising, from 1987 to 1993.

Most notable families aligned with Fatah politically with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. In addition, some notable families were independent politically, but assumed a mainstream nationalist posture consistent with Fatah's ideology under the Oslo accords. Notable families have an interest in stability and a relatively effective state as only under these circumstances can notables use their superior skills sets (education and resources) to maximum advantage. Chaos and state breakdown work to the advantage of those with guns and brawn, which are not the comparative advantage of the notables. This is one key difference between clans and notables: clans are most powerful when the state is weak, while notables benefit the most from a stronger state.

Tribes, Clans and Families under Arafat

As noted, the first Palestinian *intifada* weakened the power of Palestinian clans and notable families by bringing to power, at the societal level, a new elite that was relatively modernist in its orientation. This elite (also known as the *intifada* elite, or young guard in Khalil Shikaki's nomenclature) emphasized institutional authority and was critical to the building of civil society organizations in the West Bank and Gaza. Civil society represents non-familial, horizontal forms of social organization, at odds with clannish social organization (which is familial and vertical).

Yasir Arafat instituted a 'politics of antithesis' in order to consolidate his power and the power of an externally-based PLO elite that returned from exile, largely from Tunisia, in 1994. In spite of the fact that the *intifada* elite, or young guard, was linked to the PLO, they still represented a threat to the 'Tunisian' PLO because of their superior everyday, grassroots authority in West Bank and Gazan society. In order to weaken this competing elite and strengthen his own political hand, Arafat instituted policies designed to undermine institutional politics and strengthen the

politics of personality, family and patronage. In short, there was a 'tribalization' of politics under Yasir Arafat as a means to consolidate his power.

Encouraging the empowerment of local leaders, especially those from powerful clans, would tend to undermine national leaders and parties who had no one particular geographical base, but could appeal all across Palestine. The single most important step taken toward 'tribalizing' Palestinian politics under Arafat was the adoption of a Fatah-supported elections law that governed the January 1996 parliamentary (PLC) elections. The election law divided the West Bank and Gaza Strip into 16 electoral districts, and all parliamentary representatives had to be elected from their home district in a first-past-the-post format. Most analysts had recommended a single district, proportional representation system for a geographic region as small as the PA, but this would have disadvantaged local *shaykhs*, patriarchs, clan elders and notables who had no national standing. By contrast, larger and more populous Israel has a single district, proportional representation system.

Clans became kingmakers in their own districts, often maneuvering to have one of their own members elected to parliament. Even where clans backed candidates outside of their own *hamula*, the clan *diwan* became a major focus of politicking and deal making during the election campaign.

The electoral law produced what it was designed to produce: a parliament of clan leaders, largely pliant to the wishes of Arafat and his cabinet, with only a relative handful of independent, national leaders elected. The most prominent national leader elected to the PLC and the man who won the most votes of any candidate, the late Haydar 'Abd al-Shafi, ultimately resigned from parliament, citing its uselessness.

A second major PA institution designed to empower tribal and clan interests under Arafat was the establishment of the Department of Tribal Affairs. This department legitimated and empowered tribal (and large clan) groups in numerous ways, not least of which by directing state resources to tribal social formations. In addition to patronage flows, the Department of Tribal Affairs also undermined the formal institutions of the rule of law in Palestine by promoting the 'informal' justice sector—that is, the tribal 'sulha' conflict resolution method. Indeed, the office of the PA presidency established a specialized corps of intermediaries designed as a 'rapid reaction' reconciliation force to prevent tribal murders from becoming full-fledged tribal (or clan) wars. In addition to this corps of tribal mediators, the PA established specialized departments in '*urf*' (customary law) and *islah* (customary conflict resolution).

At first glance, empowering tribal mediation and tribal customary law may strike an observer as a positive development designed to decrease internal social conflict among Palestinian social groups. And, indeed, it did so to some degree, especially after the destruction of PA police facilities beginning in 2000. However, there are serious shortcomings to such an approach, beyond undercutting the formal institutions of justice in Palestine. For example, more powerful tribes tend to get more justice; women are systematically excluded from the tribal justice process and thus get no justice; marginalized individuals and families, like women, enjoy no protection under tribal law.

The PA acted as though it were a large tribe in a number of cases. In particular, when a police or security official killed a Palestinian civilian, the PA often paid *dija*—blood money—rather than perform an official investigation and hold parties personally responsible.

A final example of the tribalization of politics under Arafat was the recruitment process by the various security forces (about 14 in all). Each security force tended to recruit new members from specific clans. Thus, security forces became an extension of clan politics and interests, and

rivalries amongst clans then got reflected in rivalries among security forces. Clan rivalry was not the only source of fragmentation among the security forces, but it was a major contributing factor.

The logic of tribalizing politics, as noted, was to undermine the new elite and the political parties and factions they represented. While this policy was particularly directed at Hamas and cadres from the leftist parties of the PLO (which tended to be better organized than Fatah) it did also tend to disempower the more modernist elements from Fatah as well. Fatah transformed itself into a large and fragmented party that added any social and political element that wanted to enjoy the flows of patronage. While tribes and clans are not ideologically inclined by nature, they were happy to hop on the Fatah bandwagon after 1994. Arafat's political agenda matched up nicely with the interests of Palestinian tribes and clans. Fatah became the party of choice for most clans.

The Role of Clans under Conditions of State Breakdown, 2000-2008

By contrast to the first uprising, the second intifada that began in 2000 following the collapse of peace negotiations strengthened Palestinian clans. It did so for two primary reasons. First, six years of PA rule under Arafat had generally strengthened clan politics and undermined institutions-based politics for the reasons noted above. So clans were generally in a good position to take advantage of the societal crisis that the *intifadat al-Aqsa* created. That major clans were also now armed, meant that they could provide protection and security for members, making them more attractive. As the police and security forces dissolved, many members simply took their weapons and returned to the clan's quarters.

PA institutions of law and order collapsed rapidly with the second uprising, largely because they were the primary targets of Israeli military activities. All Palestinian police stations and security force buildings were destroyed by Israel. With an inoperative police force, the court system barely functioned. In short, the institutional framework of the Palestinian Authority was destroyed, compelling Palestinians society to function in the absence of any state authority, either their own or an occupying power. In this return to a near Hobbesian state of nature, primordial groups—clans—were best situated to provide security and some other basic social functions to their members.

The ability of clans to provide protection for their members became an essential feature of Palestinian life in the near absence of a state, especially as anti-Israeli actions slowly gave way to more intra-Palestinian factional fighting and general increases in crime. Palestinians from weaker clans found themselves more vulnerable to crime as their family name was no deterrent. Palestinians from powerful clans could often avoid being victims of crime simply because of their clan name. Perpetrators would know there would be serious consequences for attacking someone from a powerful clan.

In addition to personal security, clans tended to become a refuge for financial security under circumstances of high unemployment and a collapsing economy. What few jobs were available would be filled by family members, especially in an economy dominated by small family-run businesses. In addition, clans often redistributed scarce income across all family units, insuring that all members had enough resources to survive. Increasingly, this type of familial redistribution of resources (an old function of clans, after all), became formalized with a clan fund managed by trusted senior members of the clan. Diaspora members of the clan were expected to contribute to this fund, and some did so to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars. These familial funds were—and are, especially in Gaza—essential to the prevention of even higher rates of malnutrition and deprivation among Palestinians.

In the absence of state regulation, clans have played a major role in the informal economy as well. In some cases, this economy was based on extortion. For example, clans would periodically set up roadblocks and charge vehicles fees for safe passage. Again, this was done principally in the

Gaza Strip. Kidnappings by clans for ransom also increased during this period, with journalists being a favorite target. Other criminal activities, such as car theft and resale, tended to be organized primarily along clan lines. Smuggling became a major source of funding for some clans. While smuggling occurred in both the West Bank and Gaza, it was a more pressing, and thus profitable business in the Strip. This became even more true following the January 2006 election of Hamas and the increasingly tight siege placed by Israel around Gaza.

Smuggling via tunnels from Rafah to the Egyptian side of the border has been a particularly important source of revenue for some clans. Reportedly, the powerful Samhadana clan controls many of these smuggling tunnels, and charges fees for their use. Fuel, cigarettes and other popular consumer goods appear to be the most commonly smuggled items into Gaza. Israel charges that these tunnels have also been used to smuggle in weaponry. Hamas' recent ability to fire rockets into Ashqelon supports the allegation, as these rockets are reportedly Katyushas, not Qassams, and thus had to get into Gaza somehow.

The death of Arafat in November 2004 had a centrifugal effect on Palestinian clans. Arafat was the personal hub that distributed and controlled the flow of patronage to various actors, including allied clans. While Arafat's control over clan politics had weakened substantially in the several years before his death, especially in Gaza, he did represent the last vestige of PA control over the clans. Neither the PA nor Fatah nor the PLO has anyone that has been able to substantially replace Arafat in his ability shape and manipulate clan politics and behavior. Abbas simply does not have the ties, history and knowledge of the clan networks and dynamics that Arafat did. While Fatah continues to reach out to clans and encourages a culture of vendetta in Gaza as a means to undermine Hamas' rule there, it has not been able to replicate Arafat's mastery of clan politics.

Perhaps the most symbolic representation of the rise of clan power in the period of PA state collapse occurred in Gaza following Israel's withdrawal from its settlements there in 2005. Following Israel's departure, powerful clans grabbed some of the abandoned settlement lands—prime real estate along the beach. Whether under Fatah control or now Hamas control of Gaza, the PA has not been able to eject the clans from those settlement lands to this day.

Clan Politics under Hamas Rule in Gaza

Hamas' victory in the January 2006 parliamentary elections^[1] substantially enhanced its power in Palestine, and especially in Gaza where it has always been strongest. Fatah's unwillingness to relinquish the perquisites of power—of more than a decade of essentially single party rule in Palestine—was chiefly behind 17 months of tension and periodic bloodshed between Hamas and Fatah. Fearing an imminent coup d'état, Hamas launched a four-day offensive against Fatah in Gaza in June 2007, effectively expelling Fatah forces from the Strip. Since June 2007, Hamas alone has ruled Gaza.

Hamas initially took a hard line stand against the clans as part of a broader law-and-order posture. Indeed, Hamas enjoyed significant success in decreasing lawlessness in Gaza. The murder rate—which had increased 50 percent in 2006 from 2005—was returned to normal levels. Hamas also effectively banned the use of clan and factional roadblocks and the extortion that went with them. Hamas also banned the public display of guns, the use of gunfire at weddings, and the wearing of masks in public. Hamas gained high marks in public surveys for its law-and-order campaign. Even in its rhetoric, Hamas took on an explicit anti-*'asabiya* posture. *'Asabiya*, meaning communal loyalty, has a long and valued tradition in the Arab world, celebrated most famously by Ibn Khaldun. To openly challenge such loyalty constituted a political risk by Hamas, but one that they seemed to win.

Hamas in its zeal sought to disband the militia attached to clans, and it started by taking on the powerful Dughmush clan which in March 2007 had abducted BBC journalist Alan Johnston.

Political entreaties to free Johnston had failed, so Hamas went after the Dughmush militarily. After a fierce firefight in early July, the Dughmush relented and freed Johnston. Fresh off of its defeat of the Dughmush militia, Hamas took on the Hillis clan in October—a clan known for its close ties to Fatah. While Hamas was able to defeat the Hillis militia, it was startled to find other clan militia coming to the defense of the Hillis. Clans do not normally unite in common defense, so it was a troubling development.

In 2008, Hamas has begun to use a more nuanced and sophisticated approach to the clans of Gaza. While Hamas still takes a hard line on the public display of weapons, it has allowed the clan militia to hang on to their arms privately. Hamas seems to have recognized that trying to challenge the clans directly is a politically problematic tactic, especially given Fatah's embrace of the clans as a vehicle to undermine Hamas' power in Gaza. By taking a more balanced approach to the clans, Hamas hopes to neutralize clan opposition to Hamas' rule. It is a policy that appears to be paying dividends.

As part of its greater charm offensive toward the clans, Hamas has changed its rhetoric to some degree. Instead of blasting *'asabiya*, Hamas now praises *urf* (tribal customary law) as largely consistent with and complementary to *shari'a*, Islamic law. Hamas has also praised the conservative social customs of traditional clans, recognizing it shares those values in kind.

Hamas may also have learned the lesson to play some clans off against each other, as opposed to uniting them in common against Hamas policies. There is considerable evidence and many claims that Hamas is more closely allying with some smaller clans with the aim of diminishing the power of larger clans in Gaza. In any case, Hamas' dominant strategy appears to neutralize the ability of clans to be a vehicle for Fatah power in Gaza, and that neutralization must include both carrots and sticks.

Clans and Political Islam

Tribes, clans and notable families are not social organizations generally receptive to radical Islamism or jihadism. Indeed, they are forces for conservative, status-quo oriented social norms. Clans, particularly those in Gaza, have recently been accused of harboring jihadi tendencies, but this is an error in interpretation. It seems to derive primarily from the Dughmush clan's militia being named *jaysh al-Islam* (the Army of Islam) and its leader using jihadi rhetoric to justify the kidnapping of a BBC journalist. Whether or not an individual member of the Dughmush might be a jihadi is not relevant. The point is that the clan's militia, in acting in the clan's interest, will eschew radical ideologies and pursue activities that advance the clan's interests. The militia will act in a way to materially advance those interests, not out of ideological purity. Masking clan interests by assigning an Islamic name to a militia is not at all unusual.

Reminiscent of Edward Banfield's old study of clans in southern Italy, Palestinian clans act on the principle of *amoral familism*. That is, members of the clan will act to advance the interests of the clan over all other social ties. Such actions are neither moral nor immoral, but simply reflect the ascendancy of clan identity under current circumstances. Thus, the kidnapping of a journalist for ransom, or the setting up of a roadblock to extort 'safe passage fees' both promote the material interests of the clan (by providing it resources). While these actions may strike an outside observer as normatively problematic, even immoral, they would be seen as morally consistent with advancing the interests of the clan by fellow clan members. Amoral familism amongst clans thrives especially in circumstances of state breakdown or the absence of state authority, such as in Somalia or Gaza. Giving such actions an Islamic name, as happens in both places, only hides the fact that it is clan interests at work, not jihadism (which almost always comes from atomized individuals). The fact that Hamas has had seriously strained relations with the clans and their "Islamic" militia underlines this fact.

Notable families in Palestine have long provided the upper ranks of the *'ulama*, or clergy. In fact, the relationship between the upper merchant class and the high clergy has been strong in Palestine as throughout most of the Middle East. The Husayni family is the stereotypical example of a notable landowning family that produced both well-to-do merchants and top members of the clergy, most famously the Mufti of Jerusalem under the British, Haj Amin al-Husayni.

The broad growth in educational opportunities and other social changes have opened up the ranks of Palestinian *'ulama* to more economically modest families, who can have a greater affinity for more radical interpretations of Islam. However, Palestinian radical Islamism, like radical Islamism everywhere, is led primarily by lay Islamists, not clerics. And where clerics are involved, they tend to be from the lower ranks of the *'ulama*. In any case, notable families and the clerical members they still generate almost never embrace radical interpretations of Islam. They are almost always a force for ideological moderation.

Clans, Tribes and the State: Some Conclusions and Policy Implications

- ***Clans are a double-edged sword.*** On one, clans clearly enhance social stability and mitigate against societal collapse under extreme conditions of state breakdown. They provide personal security and financial survival in Hobbesian circumstances. On the other hand, clan militia and systems of tribal justice directly undermine state building and state efficacy. Clan militia prevent states from enjoying a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, a cornerstone of what a state is. Tribal conflict resolution, while helpful to social peace in the absence of a state, undermine state institutions and standards of equal justice under conditions of state building. Thus, policies that encourage the empowerment of clans may be appropriate in extreme circumstances where a humanitarian disaster lurks, or as part of a counter insurgency strategy as in the Sunni tribal areas of Iraq. But there is a clear downside to such policies when a goal is to strengthen and make more efficacious institutions of a state, which in turn can provide greater stability, security, and standards of justice.
- ***The power and identity of tribes/clans are in inverse proportion to those of the state.*** The power of Palestinians clans, especially in Gaza, is far greater today than it was even a decade ago or at any time in the past 40 years. Clans and clan identity have become more important as the PA has collapsed. Even under a military occupation by the Israeli state, clans assumed a lesser role in the lives of Palestinians. So while clans do not disappear as the state becomes stronger and more efficacious, they do play a diminished role in people's lives, limited mostly to social activities. As the state weakens, clans take on greater roles, including physical and financial security.
- ***Do not romanticize tribes and clans.*** Tribes today are not the same thing as tribes a generation ago, 50 years ago, or a century ago. Palestinian clans, like clans and tribes everywhere in the Arab world today, produce their share of smart, well-educated doctors, lawyers, and engineers. While tribes a century or two ago could exist without ever encountering state power, that is no longer the case. Today politics lies at the nexus of interaction between the state and various social groups. Tribes and clans, cell phones and laptops in hand, figure out ways to tap into state resources. States figure out ways to best use tribes and clans for their own political purposes. Even in the brief history of a relatively effective PA, the nexus of state and clan was very much at the center of the practice of politics and political power. Oil wealth over the past 35 years has made this nexus of state and tribe even more important in other Arab countries. The balance of resources between state and tribe is now heavily, heavily tilted in favor of the state in a way that it wasn't even in the early part of the twentieth century. Tribes know this, and configure strategies to take advantage of it. This sort of calculation was virtually unknown in the old orientalist state. If we think about tribes and clans in a Lawrence of Arabia type

way, we will miss the very different and modern ways in which tribes now engage the state, and vice-versa.

- **Clans benefit from a weak state, notables from a coherent state.** A key difference between notable families and clans, is that clans were better suited to take advantage of a power vacuum when the PA collapsed. Be it creating substantial militia or digging tunnels for smuggling in the gray economy, large clans showed an aptitude for advancing their interests in the absence of state power. Conversely, elite urban notable families do not do well in the rough and tumble of a Hobbesian environment. Rather, their strengths are better suited toward taking advantage of a rather more coherent state in a relatively stable environment. Their education, resources, and access to the hallways of power can best be put to use under conditions of relative stability.
- **Clans are not ideologically committed, will play off outsiders.** Palestinian clans practice amoral familialism designed to advance the interests of the clan above all else (especially in conditions of statelessness). Amoral familialism means, among other things, that clans are not prone to extreme ideological commitment. Thus, Palestinian clans, *qua* clans, are highly unlikely to join the ranks of jihadism, although individual members may on their own. It also means that clans are prone to play off outsiders—be it Hamas or Fatah—to get the best deal for the clan, and will ‘change sides’ if a better deal is to be had. Thus, policy makers should not expect certain clans to be eternal allies or implacable foes. Their alliance patterns will shift according to the totality of the resource packages being offered. As noted above, as the state strengthens, the autonomy of clans to shift alliances, and the importance of it if they do, declines. As the state weakens, clans become more autonomous players, and the importance of their shifts increases.

Appendix: Tribes, Clans and Notable Families in Palestine

GAZA:

Tribal Confederations (*Saffs*):

- Hayawat
- Tarabeen
- Tayaha
- Ijbara
- Azazma
- Jahalin

Clans and Notable Families (*Hamula* and *a'yan*)

- Reyyes
- Shawwa
- Abu Middain
- Dughmush
- Abd al-Shafi
- Mughani
- Mattar
- Hillis
- Bakr
- Shawwaf
- Abu Hassanayn
- Abu Sharkh

- Madhun
- Agha
- Adwan
- Dira
- Jaraf
- Abu Warda
- Abu Taha
- Buhaisi
- Abu Khusa

Rafah:

- Al-Sha'ir (and Khan Yunis)
- Abu Samhadana
- Abu Naja

Bayt Hanun:

- Kafarna
- Masri
- Abu Awda
- Abu Amash

Khan Yunis:

- Ashur
- Mamar
- Jughan
- Barbakh
- Abu Kuwayra
- Masri
- Majayda
- Shahwan
- Abu Taha

Jabalya:

- Nasir
- Samana

Dayr al-Balah:

- Abu Mashaseeb

JERUSALEM:

- Husayni
- Nashashibi
- Nusayba
- Khalidi
- Dajani

- Dakkak
- Bani Zayd
- Bani Murra
- Bani Himar
- Simhan
- Alami
- Uraqat
- Baytuni
- Hasan
- Ka'raja
- Abu Ghawsh
- Darwish
- Lahham
- Khatib
- Salah

HEBRON:

- Tamimi
- Ja'bari
- 'Amr
- 'Azza
- Dweik
- Muhtasib
- 'Amla
- Atallah
- Qawasma
- Natshi

NABLUS:

- 'Abd al-Hadi
- Tuqan
- Masri
- Jarrar
- Nabulsi
- Hilmi
- Al-Sayf
- Ahfat
- Jayyusi
- Al-Ahmad
- Rayyan
- Qasim
- Duwaykat
- Mansur
- Bani Shamsa
- Nimr
- Burqawi
- Al-Hajj Muhammad
- Kan'an
- Shaq'a

RAMALLAH/AL-BIRA:

- Tawil
- Khalaf
- Barghouthi
- Musleh
- Khoury
- Ziyada
- Haniyya
- Kamal

BETHELEHEM:

- Ta'amra
- Lahham
- Barghouthi
- Freij
- Dawud
- Hizbun
- 'Atrash
- Rishmawi
- Hamad

JERICHO:

- Suwayti
- Uraqat

TULKARIM:

- Hanun

HALHUL:

- Milhem

QALQILYA:

- Nasr

'ANABTA:

- Hamdallah

JENIN:

- Yahya
- Abu Hasan
- Shami
- Al-Ahmad

SALFIT:

- Jawwad

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1. The Palestinian electoral law had been changed prior to the 2006 elections to allow for half the seats to come from national lists, and half the seats to come from district elections. The national elections produce a virtual tie between Fatah and Hamas, with the latter winning a slim plurality. Hamas pummeled Fatah in the district elections due primarily to party discipline. Hamas ran one candidate per open seat. Conversely, Fatah and Fatah-allied independents (often Fatah cadres who were not chosen to run so ran as independents) ran multiple candidates, splitting the Fatah vote. On average, each Hamas candidate ran against six Fatah and Fatah-allied candidate.

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