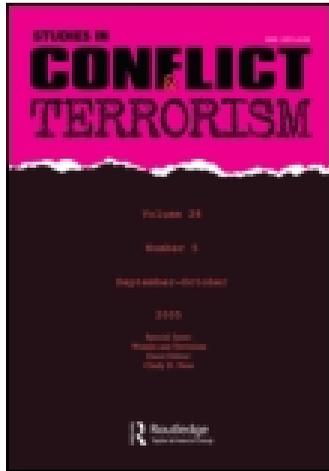


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The Decision to Begin Talks with Terrorists: Lessons for Policymakers

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Governments have many means to begin a dialogue with terrorist groups. The offer of talks may lead terrorists' constituents to reduce their support for violence, and moderates within a group itself may also turn away from violence. Despite these potential benefits, even the consideration of entering discussions carries many risks. Talks with U.S. officials do indeed reward the use of terrorism, tangibly demonstrating that groups can kill innocents and yet become legitimate interlocutors—a reward that is costly both in terms of reducing the prevalence of this tactic worldwide and because it inevitably angers local allies fighting the groups. Moreover, talks often fail in a variety of ways, giving the terrorists a breathing space to rearm and organize and leaving the government looking foolish. Because talks often fail, policymakers should carefully explore whether the conditions are right for any hope of success before they begin a dialogue.

Beginning a dialogue with terrorists is often a necessary first step on the road toward a political settlement and an end to the violence. However, the conditions for progress are often lacking, and the initiation of talks may strengthen terrorists and anger allies. Success, when it occurs, takes years and is usually incomplete. Nelson Mandela, Yasir Arafat, and Gerry Adams are among those once branded terrorists whom the United States and other countries have engaged in the hopes of bringing a lasting peace to strife-torn lands. Yet as the experience with these three individuals suggests, the track record of talking with terrorists is mixed: Mandela went from being considered a terrorist to becoming a respected elder statesman, while Adams and particularly Arafat proved at best fitful peacemakers.

For U.S. and other Western policymakers, this question is now more pressing than ever as they confront the question of how to handle terrorist groups that have become part of a government.¹ As Lebanon's government moves away from being a mere Syrian satrapy toward independence, the United States is working with it to minimize Damascus's influence and to end the use of Lebanese soil as a haven for terrorists: a problem going back to the 1960s. The Israeli–Palestinian dispute poses a related challenge. The United States has long been involved with the Palestinian Authority, but the terrorist group Hamas now has—through democratic elections—members occupying senior positions in the administration.

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In both cases, the United States may be forced to talk, directly or indirectly, with the very terrorist organizations it seeks to defeat. More generally, the United States should consider talks if it might move these or other movements away from violence and get them to focus on peaceful politics.

This article surveys lessons from attempts to talk to various terrorist groups in recent decades. After reviewing the various methods used to initiate dialogue, it focuses on the advantages and costs of engaging terrorists and the conditions that facilitate success.² It concludes with a brief examination of the implications for whether to engage with Hamas and Hezbollah.

Getting Engagement Started

Initiating talks with terrorists is often difficult for a host of reasons. Terrorist and government leaders may want gestures of good faith from the other before talks begin, and constituents on both sides have long become accustomed to viewing the potential interlocutors as enemies and even as fundamentally evil. To minimize the chance that an offer of talks might be turned down in an embarrassing way or viewed as “soft” by one’s own side, governments have resorted to a host of methods for beginning engagement short of open and official talks.

Diplomacy by declaration is one common way of talking without having formal talks. Governments may issue formal statements that offer the promise or hint of talks subject to certain concessions by the terrorist group. For example, on 15 December 1993 leaders of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland issued the “Downing Street Declaration,” which offered the PIRA a role in negotiations over Northern Ireland’s future should it reject violence.³ Using declarations rather than direct negotiations offers governments a political advantage as they can claim they are condemning violence even as they hold out the possibility of talks. The declarations, of course, often are necessarily vague and are difficult to use for delicate discussions of any *quid pro quo*.

Rather than issue formal declarations, both terrorist groups and governments may grant interviews or otherwise encourage media reports that convey their message on the conditions for negotiations: an approach that Kirsten Sparre has labeled “megaphone diplomacy.”⁴ Leaders of both the PIRA (through Sinn Fein, the terrorist group’s political wing) and the British government gave repeated interviews as the PIRA considered entering talks in the mid-1990s. This method, like the use of declarations, enabled the government and the group to avoid charges of even considering talks until both sides could be satisfied that some concessions by the other were on the table.⁵

An alternative to the public but distant approach via declarations and the media is to rely on trusted intermediaries who, discreetly, will pass messages to terrorist groups. Governments may quietly use members of a foreign government or dependable members of a community to convey messages. Such individuals can be more easily disavowed given their lack of links to the government in question. The PIRA and the British government communicated for years through the Redemptorist priest Alex Reid, whose discretion and good offices both sides trusted. Similarly, the Reagan administration conveyed messages to Arafat and his advisers through Swedish Foreign Minister Sten Andersson about what Arafat and his organization must do before the U.S. government would engage in talks. (At times, governments have used individuals who do not have their full confidence. The Reagan administration, for example, conveyed messages to Arafat on conditions for talks through American Jewish peace activists.)⁶

A more official but still discreet method is for governments to use intelligence officers or other deniable but official individuals as interlocutors. In 1973, CIA Deputy Director Vernon Walters met with PLO officials in Tunis, which produced a promise that the organization would not attack Americans. The United States also passed diplomatic messages via lower level CIA operatives who had already established contacts with PLO officials in Beirut to exchange information on protecting diplomats.⁷ The British have taken this approach recently with Hamas, using their intelligence agents to hold secret talks as a means of encouraging a cease-fire.⁸ When such a back channel is leaked, it can prove embarrassing to governments that claimed not to negotiate with terrorists, but the use of intelligence officials is less politically risky than formal ties.

At times, low-profile official talks may also be desired. Because they are not deniable, diplomats or other senior officials can convey the seriousness of a government's commitment to talks more convincingly than other interlocutors. In 1972, even though the United Kingdom official foreswore negotiations with the IRA, senior government leaders met with IRA members, including Adams who was transported from prison for the talks.⁹

If direct talks with terrorists are too difficult or objectionable, governments can work through a political wing, including one they help create. Governments can knowingly allow a group to form an overt political wing as a way of engaging the organization. Spain encouraged the formation of Herri Batasuna as a political party, even though it was closely tied to ETA.¹⁰ Similarly, the United Kingdom allowed Sinn Fein to function even though for many years it was, as Jonathan Stevenson notes, a "mere beard" of the PIRA's Army Council.¹¹ Governments can then negotiate directly or indirectly with these political figures with less risk.

Potential Rewards

Talks can help end terrorist violence both by convincing terrorist leaders and cadre to reject violence and by encouraging dissent within the terrorist group's ranks, which in turn may lead the group to implode.¹² Talks can foster these general conditions through a variety of specific mechanisms.

Perhaps the most important means of influencing a terrorist group through talks is to change the opinions of the group's real and supposed constituents. An offer of talks may not convince terrorist leaders to change course by itself, but their publics—hopeful that talks might lead to peace and other benefits—may become less supportive of violence. This increases pressure on the group to hold off on violence for fear of losing recruits, money, and overall sympathy.¹³

Constituents may also turn against a group if it becomes more involved in local politics. Some terrorist organizations enjoy a level of popularity because they do not participate in politics, a particularly valuable claim in regions such as the Middle East where corruption is rampant. By allowing or encouraging groups entrée into politics as part of engagement, some group members are likely to put their hand in the till, fail to produce on grandiose promises, or otherwise tarnish their ostensibly pure image.

Just as talks can change the opinions of constituents, they can also strengthen more moderate elements of a terrorist group, which in turn increases the chances of successful negotiation. The U.S. dialogue with Adams that began in 1994 contributed to the PIRA cease-fire decision later in that year in part by strengthening Adams's stature at the expense of those in the PIRA's senior ranks who favored continued violence.¹⁴ Talks are even more

likely to affect the perceptions of less committed sympathizers, who may favor a group's cause but prefer peace if possible.

Ironically, the newly converted terrorists may prove ideal interlocutors. In many countries where terrorism occurs, the terrorists claim to represent a broader nationalist or ideological cause. Many other leaders of this cause may oppose peace talks or any conciliation even though they have not used violence. If former terrorists do embrace the call for peace, they may be able to face down those who use the nationalist card. Former Protestant terrorists in Northern Ireland, for example, were able to ridicule Protestant nationalists who ritualistically declared "Ulster will fight" because they had already served prison time and otherwise demonstrated their *bona fides*.¹⁵

Even if talks do not in the end succeed in gentling the entire group, they may create divisions within it. Terrorist groups that enjoy widespread support often are vulnerable to fissures, as the members' goals and commitment levels are likely to vary considerably. Talks that lead to an offer of concessions can create fractures within a movement. The British hoped that if talks failed to produce a settlement with the PIRA, they would at least create divisions within its ranks and weaken the group as a whole.¹⁶

Talks also serve intelligence purposes. Talks can provide additional information on a terrorist group's true priorities and on which members of its leadership have the most influence. The British government, for example, learned that removing monarchical symbols (such as changing the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the Police Service of Northern Ireland) won them unexpected points with Irish nationalists.¹⁷ Years of negotiations with Palestinian leaders gave the United States a wealth of information about the relative weight of different officials within the organization. Intelligence rewards may grow even larger if moderate constituents linked to a group can be wooed. The Italian Communists, for example, provided vital intelligence in helping the Italian government crush the Red Brigades, as the two organizations had overlapping constituencies.¹⁸

Finally, there are risks of not negotiating. Terrorism is not static: a refusal to engage in talks may strengthen extremists by showing that nonviolent means offer no hope. In addition, some terrorist organizations spring from moderate movements that encountered only government repression. A refusal to talk may thus discourage new leaders who might otherwise have preferred peaceful means of change. Hamas and other Islamists, for example, historically gained more support when peace talks were foundering.¹⁹

Risks

Talks with terrorists have many risks, ranging from political embarrassment to encouraging more violence and even strengthening the group's capacity for bloodshed. Not surprisingly, these concerns make governments particularly leery of even the prospects of negotiations with terrorist groups.

The most commonly cited objection to talks with terrorists is that any recognition of a terrorist group—and talks certainly constitute a form of recognition—rewards the use of terrorism. Most terrorist groups crave legitimacy, as their very tactics rightly lead them to be shunned by the world and by many would-be constituents.²⁰ Even if talks involve no concessions on the part of a government, by recognizing terrorists as worthy interlocutors they have gained a victory with potential followers and other states. Other terrorists and would-be terrorists may believe that continued or even increased violence may lead to eventual recognition. The drawback that engagement may prove to observers that terrorism "works" is particularly damaging as the United States is engaged in a war on terrorism that

seeks to discredit the legitimacy of this tactic entirely as well as oppose particular terrorist groups.

Talks with terrorists may also diminish the stigma of the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) designation. In addition to the legal implications of negotiating with an FTO, the list itself was established in 1996 to demonstrate U.S. government efforts to anathematize terrorist organizations. Moreover, the list helps offer a focal point for international cooperation against terrorist groups. U.S. exceptions to its own list may weaken the moral sanction of any listing and encourage other states to offer similar exceptions, hindering cooperation.

The political price is particularly heavy today. Although U.S. leaders and the U.S. public have always opposed terrorism, the 9/11 attacks have heightened repugnance toward all terrorist groups, not just Al Qaeda. Negotiating with a terrorist group today is thus a far more contentious political issue than it was for the United States in the past.

Paying the price of recognition might be worthwhile if there was a guarantee of success in the end. Alas, most talks are likely to end in failure. The conditions for ending long-standing conflicts are often difficult or impossible to meet, and terrorism in particular needs only a small group of people to continue. Putting a government's credibility on the line, both at home and overseas, is thus risky, particularly as it may be at the mercy of a small group of diehard killers. More moderate members of a terrorist group face a similar risk: talks with the United Kingdom in the early 1970s discredited older PIRA members and led to the rise of a younger, more radical cadre who continued violence with little progress for over twenty years.²¹ Those who advocate talks on both the government and terrorists' side risk looking foolish.

Even success, when it comes, often is incremental rather than complete—a challenge that increases the political price of talks. Some groups may accept a cease-fire or other conditions for talks but engage in activities that suggest a change of heart remains far off. When the PIRA accepted a cease-fire in September 1994, it kept its cell structure and logistics network and continued such brutal behavior as beating supposed collaborators and criminals with iron bars. Even after talks had progressed for several years, it made no effort to shut down its infrastructure of cells or decommission any weapons, including its stockpiles of Semtex and mortars.²²

Government efforts to split a movement and wean the moderates away succeed, but enough hardcore members remain that terrorism continues. Many members of the Basque separatist movement ETA's political wing Herri Batasuna responded to the Spanish government's policy of "social reinsertion" (concessions that maximized Basque cultural and political rights) but some radicals maintained control over the movement and continued violence in the name of complete independence.²³ Many members of M-19 in Columbia also turned away from bloodshed, but a violent fringe remained.²⁴ This partial success, although far from ideal, can still reduce the scale of violence and make it easier to gather intelligence on the perpetrators.

An engaged movement itself may reject violence, but new groups may form from rejectionist remnants. The Continuity IRA and the Real IRA both rejected the PIRA's embrace of negotiations over violence and conducted several bloody attacks after the PIRA had signed the Good Friday agreements.²⁵ Such fringe players may actually increase their use of violence, escalating in order to derail promising peace talks.²⁶

Even if splinters do not emerge as rival movements, "spoilers" within the group are a constant problem for any attempt to end a conflict. Terrorist groups are particularly likely to produce what Stephen Stedman has labeled "total spoilers"—factions that seek total power and which cannot be swayed by limited concessions.²⁷ A terrorist leadership faces a

dilemma when it cannot completely control its own members, even if the leadership itself has genuinely embraced peace. Admitting a lack of control weakens the leaders' internal credibility and discredits them as a negotiating partner, as they cannot claim to end the violence. Pretending continued control, in contrast, leaves them open to charges that they deliberately incited the violence. Stevenson notes that Adams probably neither initiated nor sanctioned the Canary Wharf attack that shattered the two-year cease-fire in 1996, but he was not able to condemn it for fear of displaying weakness or admitting embarrassing splits in the movement.²⁸

Some terrorist groups may enter talks and even proclaim a cease-fire with no intention of permanently renouncing violence. Because terrorist groups often win by demonstrating their staying power, simply buying time in the face of an aggressive government counterterrorism campaign can be immensely valuable to them. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam repeatedly used cease-fires to rearm and regroup for the next offensive. In 1998 ETA announced a cease-fire due to constituents' outrage when it murdered a local politician. When ETA broke the cease-fire in 2000, its leaders claimed it was a tactical trick to counter Spanish and French pressure.²⁹ Some organizations raise money or otherwise develop their institutional capacity during a lull. Adams raised \$1 million in a trip to the United States in 1995—money that helped sustain the organization's capacity for violence.³⁰

The entry of terrorists into talks can also transform the political scene. If terrorists are allowed to participate in politics, they will be able to challenge moderate but weak political leaders and thus may radicalize the peaceful opposition. Moreover, they can use their peaceful political organizations to feed money and recruits into their radical wing, a process that can prove particularly devastating should the group go underground again.

Governments will also pay a price if they talk to terrorist groups active against an ally. A U.S. decision to talk to terrorists is likely to anger the government they oppose. After the U.S. decision to grant Adams a visa in 1994 (and to fund-raise and visit the White House on the same trip), British Prime Minister John Major repeatedly snubbed President Clinton.³¹ Israeli spokesmen have similarly protested any talks with Hamas, declaring that they are "a recipe for Hamas to continue terrorist attacks to destroy the state of Israel."³²

Asking the Right Questions

Whether engagement succeeds or fails depends on many factors, most of which are outside the control of the government in question. U.S. policymakers and analysts should consider several questions as they decide whether a particular group can be moved away from terrorism through talks.

What can the United States Offer a Terrorist Group?

An obvious question with no consistent answer is whether the United States can put enough on the table to make the terrorist group even consider changing its behavior. In some cases, the United States can convey a tremendous degree of legitimacy. For nationalist groups, talks with Washington are part of the recognition they hope will eventually lead to their being granted a state or at least greater autonomy. In other instances, Washington can exert considerable influence over the local government in question.

But U.S. influence is not uniform. The United States is peripheral to many conflicts around the globe because its interests in the country have historically been limited. Washington, for example, has kept its distance from the civil war in Algeria, in part

because the regime there was suspicious of the United States and because U.S. interests in the region were limited. In such cases, the “reward” of talks with the United States may be limited for the terrorist group.

In other instances, the United States can offer the terrorist group few carrots beyond de facto recognition. Libyan leader Moammar Qaddafi, for example, had to completely end his country’s support for terrorism and accept humiliating concessions such as sending senior intelligence officials to face trial in order for the United States to begin the process or ending the sanctions against and isolation of Libya: a one-sided bargain for many years.

Can the Terrorist Group Win Outright?

Terrorists are more likely to engage in talks without preconditions if they believe a victory through arms is unreachable. The PLO’s expulsion from Lebanon and repeated defeats by Israel led its leaders to recognize they would not gain a Palestinian homeland solely by the gun.³³ Anti-colonial terrorist groups such as the Cypriot *Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Aghoniston* and the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale*, in contrast, could make far more demands as a precondition for talks because violence was demonstrably producing political results in Britain and France respectively.

What is a Terrorist Group’s Political Position?

Terrorist groups are more likely to consider talks or other dramatic changes when they risk losing influence to rival groups. At the end of the Cold War, the PLO faced the rise of new Palestinian leaders who were involved in the first *intifada* as well as pressure for peace from the Soviet Union and moderate Arab states that once backed continued violence. Combined, these pressures made the movement more amenable to renouncing terrorism—the precondition for talks with U.S. officials.

Who Wins a Fair Election?

Terrorists are more likely to renounce violence if they believe they can win at the ballot box. Terrorists crave power. Moreover, they often see the moderates in their community as craven and at times dangerous. Thus, a moderate victory by “their” side is often deemed a failure. The African National Congress, for example, could be confident that engaging the government with the promise of entering politics would eventually lead to electoral victory—a hope that less popular groups like ETA would not share.³⁴

How Strong is the Movement Vis-à-Vis its Potential Rivals?

Weak movements are more prone to splinters and are unable to control their existing members should they continue to use violence despite the leadership’s wishes. Hizballah, in contrast, proved able to shut down radicals on its flanks who challenged it to continue more revolutionary policies in the mid-1990s.

Are the Leaders Ideologically Rigid?

Highly ideological leaders are less likely to make the concessions that are necessary for successful engagement. I. William Zartman contends that although negotiation with revolutionary absolutists is impossible, many terrorist groups do seek to negotiate on at least some issues.³⁵ If the terrorists truly reject the other side’s very right to exist, for

example, talks are likely to do much other than allow the terrorists breathing space.³⁶ Although participation in government (and hence, condoning what the group in theory sees as a corrupt and illegitimate system) is one promising sign, both PIRA and Hizballah have long maintained active terrorist wings even as they engaged in electoral politics. Indeed, many political parties have created military wings that use terrorism: a phenomenon seen in Weimar Germany, Lebanon before the 1975 civil war, the right-wing “Grey Wolves” of the Turkish National Action party, and elsewhere.³⁷

How Good is the Leadership?

Some leaders are more willing and able to shift their organization from peace to war. Arafat, infamously, never made this transition, leading to distrust among U.S. and Israeli leaders (and among Palestinian elites and Arab rulers!) that contributed to the collapse of peace talks. Mandela, in contrast, controlled his own movement and was willing to reach out to white moderates, averting the massive bloodshed and migration that characterized many African transfers of power.

What Do People Think at Home?

Success is facilitated when the government’s position on the group has strong bipartisan political support and can weather the ups and downs that characterize even a successful process.³⁸ Inevitably, charges will arise that the talks “reward terrorism” and, until time demonstrates a reduction in violence, a government can only defend its policies by noting a hope of change about which it itself is probably skeptical (a skepticism almost surely to be expressed in repeated leaks to the media). The secret negotiations that Father Reid initiated in 1986 survived PIRA assassination attempts, massive PIRA arms shipments, and other daunting provocations as well as several changes in government in Britain before, over 10 years later, they helped produce the “Good Friday” agreements. The survival of negotiations is due in part because the British government’s approach transcended party politics.³⁹ To offset such problems in the past, the United States waited to respond to Arafat’s statement renouncing terrorism until after elections in both the United States and Israel in 1988 but before President George H.W. Bush was sworn into office, minimizing the political price for the incoming administration.

Lessons for Hezbollah and Hamas

Both Hezbollah and Hamas are currently involved in politics in Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories to the degree that their members are likely to interact at least indirectly with U.S. officials. The Lebanese Hezbollah has had many members in the Lebanese parliament for over a decade and may soon take over a government ministry, posing the question of whether the United States should engage the government at all. The Palestinian terrorist group Hamas won 74 out of 132 seats in the January 2006 parliamentary election.

These groups cannot simply be shunned as in the past because the United States is engaged with the Lebanese government and the Palestinian leadership on a variety of issues. Indeed, one of the priorities in both cases is the presence of terrorist organizations. Thus, ironically, the United States may be appealing to governments that have Hezbollah and Hamas members to crack down on these very organizations.

Whether to enter into talks with either or both Hezbollah and Hamas of course depends on the particular issues to be discussed and the context of talks. In addition, the characteristics of these groups and of the current situation are quite distinct from many of the examples noted earlier. One of the most obvious distinctions is that these groups are already engaged in electoral politics, a situation that is in some ways comparable to PIRA's experience in Northern Ireland but nonetheless usual for terrorist groups. In addition, the United States is a third party, whereas many of the aforementioned examples involve talks between a terrorist group and the government it immediately opposes. Hezbollah also is engaged in terrorism primarily against an external enemy, Israel, rather than against the Lebanese government. These differences and others must be factored in and the lessons in the previous sections adjusted accordingly. Nevertheless, the earlier observations provide some issues to consider as talks with either organization are weighed.

Both Hamas and Hezbollah have an incentive to seek the legitimization that talks with the United States offer as both already fare well politically. Hezbollah's base is confined to Lebanon's Shi'a community: the country's largest group, but still less than a majority. Lebanon's electoral rules that divide up positions among all major groups further limit the organization. However, Hezbollah has done extremely well in recent elections and by some counts is the single largest bloc in the Lebanese parliament. Also encouraging for talks is that both groups have demonstrated a degree of ideological flexibility over the years on key issues.⁴⁰

Part of the challenge for U.S. talks with Hezbollah is that the United States exerts at best limited influence over the level of influence the group gains through legitimate political activity. Hezbollah already has a large political party structure, a major social network, numerous media organizations, and other open organs that most terrorist organizations crave. Ironically, Hezbollah's very strength reduces the rewards it would gain from talks: Hezbollah does not need to make major concessions to the United States to flourish politically, and for the organization to abandon its support of terrorism (particularly its training of Palestinian militants) would go against the organization's ethos and hurt the interests of Iran and Syria, its primary sponsors. Thus the benefits of open political activity that groups like the PLO gained would be minimal.⁴¹

Hamas, in contrast, would gain more rewards. The United States enjoys considerable leverage with both Israel and with the Palestinian Authority. Talks with Washington would give Hamas leaders additional political clout and the legitimacy it now seeks. Such recognition might also open the spigots of aid that the United States and Europe have for now turned off.⁴²

As an organization, Hezbollah is better able to take advantage of an offer of talks than is the more disjointed Hamas. Hezbollah's leadership has demonstrated that it can seize on opportunities and change course in response to circumstances as diverse as the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon or Syria's push to have elections in the early 1990s. In both cases senior organization leaders made major shifts in its political activities and use of violence and enforced these down the chain of command. Hamas's leadership is less tested than Hezbollah's, in part because Israel's assassination campaign left the movement with fewer experienced leaders. However, in the past Hamas proved far less adept than Hezbollah in seizing on political opportunities. In addition, Hamas's organizational structure is far less centralized, with senior figures offering guidance but not exercising the same degree of control as do Hezbollah's leaders.⁴³

Talks might empower more moderate figures in both organizations, but the impact is likely to be limited in both cases. Hamas is particularly prone to splinters and already suffers a rival—Palestine Islamic Jihad—that would immediately pounce on any perceived

concessions to Israel or the United States to discredit the movement. Already, Palestine Islamic Jihad has launched attacks on Israel that have threatened the shaky truce that Hamas and Israel have recently observed. Various groups affiliated with the defeated Fatah movement also are outside Hamas' control and have an incentive to embarrass Hamas and incite violence. Many of Hamas's members are highly committed to Israel's destruction, and Israel's decimation of the group's central leadership has made it harder for the organization to control its own fringes. Taken together, these factors will make Hamas leaders reluctant to consider politically painful concessions and less able to implement them should they seek to move away from violence. Hezbollah, in contrast, has a very strong leadership and has repeatedly shown it can police its own house, enforcing dramatic changes in its political position in Lebanon and with regard to attacks against Israel.

Hezbollah also would be entering the talks without the approval of either of its two main sponsors: Iran and Syria. Both of these states seek to use Hezbollah against Israel, both directly and through the organization's support of Palestinian terrorism. When the organization has made major changes in the past, it has done so with the encouragement (or pressure) from both these patrons. Going against them would jeopardize the organization's resources and freedom of movement in Lebanon and go against its own commitment to fighting Israel.

As the aforementioned comparison suggests, talks with Hezbollah are more promising than talks with Hamas but the chances of success with Hezbollah remain low. Talks with both organizations would probable produce at best incremental changes. Hamas is too splinter-prone for a wholesale change, and its political position depends too much on continued violence. As an organization, Hezbollah is better suited for talks, but it has fewer incentives to do so.

Because the odds are poor, the United States should pursue a low risk "declaration diplomacy" approach or, at most, reach out through third parties. Should things go well and Hezbollah put issues on the table such as dropping its support for Palestinian terrorism (as well as, of course, stopping its own direct involvement in terrorism and attacks on Israel), it may be appropriate to begin deniable cover talks. However, the greater costs of more direct contacts are not worth the legitimization of either group given the low likelihood of success at this point.

Conclusions

Talks with terrorists are politically costly, usually fail, and can often backfire. Nevertheless, they are often necessary for ending conflicts and transforming a terrorist group into a legitimate political actor or driving them out of the terrorism business altogether. Policymakers and analysts alike must recognize that the conditions for success are elusive. This should make them cautious about initiating talks in general but also eager to seize on potential opportunities should the stars align and the terrorist group be ready to make a fundamental change and move away from violence. Pouncing on such an opportunity requires both political dexterity to do what was once unthinkable and a long-term view that accepts both the possibility of real change as well as the risks of failure.

Notes

1. This article does not address either the more tactical question of how to negotiate with terrorists during a crisis (such as a hostage taking) or the broader question of when talks lead to the

ultimate end of a conflict, although of course the latter issue is addressed in the discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of initiating a dialogue.

2. For interesting works on this subject, see Peter C. Sederberg, "Conciliation as Counter-Terrorist Strategy," *Journal of Peace Research*, 32(3) (1995), pp. 295–312. This article does not look at talks with terrorists as part of a limited negotiation, such as during a hostage crisis. For a review of such issues, see R. Reuben Miller, "Negotiating with Terrorists: A Comparative Analysis of Three Cases," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 5(3) (Autumn 1993), pp. 78–105.

3. Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 85.

4. Kristen Sparre, "Megaphone Diplomacy in the Northern Irish Peace Process: Squaring the Circle by Talking to Terrorists through Journalists," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 6 (1) (Winter 2001), pp. 88–104.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 97–99.

6. William Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993), pp. 369–372.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 367–368.

8. Ewen MacAskill, "UK ponders taking with Hamas and Hizbullah," *Guardian*, 20 May 2005. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,1488464,00.html>

9. Louise Richardson, "Britain and the IRA," in Robert Art and Louise Richardson, eds., *Democracy and Terrorism: Lessons from the Past* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press), forthcoming 2006.

10. Robert Art and Louise Richardson, "Introduction," in Robert Art and Louise Richardson, eds., *Democracy and Terrorism: Lessons from the Past* (Washington, DC: United States Peace Press), forthcoming 2006.

11. Stevenson, "Northern Ireland."

12. Martha Crenshaw notes that these are two primary reasons that terrorist groups decline. See Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism Research and Public Policy*, 3(1) (Spring 1991), pp. 69–87 and Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Ends," *USIP Special Report*, 25 May 1999.

13. Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," p. 86.

14. Jonathan Stevenson, "Northern Ireland: Treating Terrorists as Statesmen," *Foreign Policy* no. 105 (Winter 1996–1997), electronic version http://www.foreignpolicy.com/users/login.php?story_id=1550&URL=http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=1550; Richardson, "Britain and the IRA," in Art and Richardson, eds, draft p. 37.

15. Steve Bruce, "Terrorists and Politics: The Case of Northern Ireland's Loyalist Paramilitaries," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 13(2) (Summer 2001), p. 43.

16. Richardson, "Britain and the IRA".

17. Richardson, "Britain and the IRA".

18. Art and Richardson, Introduction.

19. Sara Roy, "Hamas and the Transformation of Political Islam in Palestine," *Current History* (January 2003), p. 17.

20. See Bruce Hoffman, "The Modern Terrorist Mindset," in Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer (eds.), *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment* (Guilford, CT: McGraw Hill, 2002), p. 93.

21. Richardson, "Britain and the IRA".

22. Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, p. 86; Stevenson, "Northern Ireland."

23. Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, p. 90.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

26. Soderberg, p. 308.

27. Stephen John Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security*, 22(2) (Fall 1997), pp. 10–11.

28. Stevenson, "Northern Ireland."

29. Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, pp. 88–90.
30. Stevenson, “Northern Ireland.”
31. Stevenson, “Northern Ireland.”
32. Ewen MacAskill, “UK ponders taking with Hamas and Hizbullah,” *Guardian*, 20 May 2005. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,2763,1488464,00.html>
33. Jon Alterman, “How Terrorism Ends,” USIP Special Report, 25 May 1999, p. 8.
34. Stevenson makes this point about the IRA as well. Stevenson, “Northern Ireland.”
35. See I. William Zartman, “Negotiating with Terrorists,” *International Negotiation* no. 8 (2003), pp. 443–450.
36. Soderberg, p. 306.
37. Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank, “Political Parties and the Formation of Terrorist Groups,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2(2) (Summer 1990), p. 130.
38. Wilkinson, *Terrorism versus Democracy*, pp. 90–91.
39. Richardson, “Britain and the IRA.”
40. See Milton-Edwards and Crooke, “Elusive Ingredient,” for a review on Hamas.
41. For a review, see Judith Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) and Hala Jaber *Hezbollah: Born With A Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
42. See Roy, “Hamas and the Transformation of Political Islam in Palestine.”
43. For a review of Hamas’ structure before the second *intifada*, see Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela. *The Palestinian HAMAS: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). In part this more decentralized structure was necessary due to Israeli counterterrorism measures, which made it dangerous for the organization to depend heavily on a few central leaders. Because Hezbollah operated in Lebanon with more impunity than Hamas did in the Palestinian territories, it was less vulnerable to the constant threat of decapitation.