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Trends. Self-Inflicted Injury as Coping Strategy: An Example from Hamas

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A basic premise of psychodynamic political psychology is that coping strategies to manage personal conflict often beget similar strategies to manage political conflict. This premise is supported by the notion that the many competing beliefs, emotions, and motives within a person constitute as political an environment--viz., infinite need and finite resources--as competing nation-states, power groups, and other political entities throughout the world.

One coping strategy to manage personal conflict is that of self-inflicted injury--e.g., eating disorders, excessive demands on the body, mutilation, even suicide. The rationales for this strategy are many. They include a(n) (1) quest to achieve self-control, even if accompanied with pain and injury, (2) management of existing pain through inflicting additional pain, (3) extirpation of components of the self that are judged to be noxious, (4) vehicle to cast blame on and increase threat for others who are (wrongly) held to be responsible for self-inflicted injury, and (5) coercive technique to control others through sequences of threatened and actual self-inflicted injury. (Even with suicide, pre-suicidal ideation often includes thoughts and feelings about the adaptive consequences for those people who will be left behind.)

A similar coping strategy may have been displayed in the West Bank, cf. Judea and Samaria, by the so-called "militant Islamic group" Hamas. Assuming that a Hamas bomb-maker was killed by other Hamas members--as opposed to Israeli or Israeli-directed assassins--one might consider the following beneficial rationales for Hamas. (1) The bomb-maker might have been worth more dead than alive to Hamas authorities because of intra-organizational conflict and even suspicions about the bomb-maker's political loyalties. (2) The bomb-maker may have been killed in a bomb-making accident, then shot, then placed near a car that subsequently exploded. Both (1) and (2) would have presented a propaganda/disinformation/active measures opportunity for Hamas against Israel. Such an opportunity would not only lead to (3) and (4) below but greater control over Hamas members and influence over Palestinians who might be considering acts against the interests of Hamas. (3) Israel could be easily blamed for the killing. This blame could further sully the Israeli image as a supporter of international law and human rights. This blame also could reinforce images of Israel as engaging in state-supported terrorism and hinder attempts by the Israeli government to focus aspersions of terrorism on various Palestinian groups. (4) Israeli protestations might not be believed given past Israeli engagement in assassinations. Israel would also be subject to the many slings and arrows fostered by innuendo induction.

Although self-inflicted injury seems paradoxical to many observers of human social behavior, it can serve many adaptive functions. For personal and political conflict alike. (See Greenberg, J. (April 7, 1998). Hamas killed its own, say Palestinians. *The New York Times*, p. A3; Jones, I.H., & Daniels, B.A. (1996). An ethological approach to self-injury. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 169, 263-267; Shore, B.A., et al. (1997). An analysis of reinforcer substitutability using object manipulation and self-injury as competing responses. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 30, 21-41; Simeon, D., Stein, D.J., & Hollander, E. (1995). Depersonalization disorder and self-injurious behavior. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 56, 36-39; Swinton, M., & Hopkins, R. (1996). Violence and self-injury. *Journal of Forensic*

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Psychiatry, 7, 563-569.) (Keywords: Adaptation, Coping Strategy, Hamas, Israel, Political Psychology, Security, Violence.)