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## Articles

### Analyzing the Impact of Turkey's Middle Eastern Policy on Palestinian Issue during Hamas in Power

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#### Abstract

This paper is focused on an overview of the main impact of Turkey's Middle Eastern policy on the Palestinian issue during Hamas in power with focusing on the main and effects roles of the regional states, which are Egypt, Syria, Iran, Qatar and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and also the roles of non-regional states as United States of America (USA), Russia and European Union (EU). The relation between Turkey and Hamas as a Palestinian Islamic political and resistance movement for liberating Palestinian occupied lands is analyzed in the unstable Middle East region.

**Keywords:** Egypt, EU, HAMAS, Iran, KSA, Middle East, Palestine, Qatar, Turkey, USA.

#### 1. Introduction

It can be said that-politically and strategically-the Palestinian issue has been the central issue in the hot region of the Middle East for years, and is one of the longest conflicts in history through the last occupation of the twenty-first century. In addition, it is an issue that affects the stability of the whole Middle East region, due to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands for more than 80 years.

This paper discusses the political relations between Hamas and the Turkish republic in light of the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), in the period from 2007–2015, the period when Hamas was the actual and authoritative government in the Gaza strip. It is a period that witnessed developments and flexibility in the relation between the two sides, whether on the political level or the level of Turkey's supporting the Gaza strip through a number of development and aid programs and projects. The paper also touches on the influence of some regional and international states in the relationship between Turkey and Hamas and the direction of this influence. Turkish-Palestinian relations, and especially relations with the Hamas movement, are important to understand the essence and dynamics of the relationship, and how Hamas has been influenced by Turkey during the reign of the Justice and Development party, especially with regards to shared ideological backgrounds of the founders of the parties, and especially the president of the AK Party and the Turkish Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In this paper, development of the relations between the Turkish Republic and Hamas movement will be discussed in light of the regress of relationships with Arab nations, some of

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whom consider the movement to hinder the overall political environment of Arab regimes. At the same time, Turkey is one of the nations which stood by the movement and embraced them by hosting them informally and hosting a number of the leadership of the first and second levels after Arab countries became more difficult for them to move in given the negative reverberations of the Arab revolts, especially in the Egyptian Arab Republic and the Syrian Arab Republic, and, on top of that, even the Yemeni republic.

This paper's importance lies in the relationship of the Turkish Republic- the heir to the Ottoman Caliphate-with Palestine which was one of the most important vilayets at that time, in addition to the political and military relations of Turkey with Israel, which is occupying Palestinian lands and which Hamas resists with the aim of liberating the occupied Palestinian lands. Last but not least, attack by the Israeli forces upon the Turkish Gaza Flotilla (*Mavi Marmara*) and the killing of 11 Turkish civilians in international waters on May 31, 2010 is an important factor.

## **2. Results and discussion**

### **Turkey in the Middle East**

Political relations are considered bilateral relations between two states who both enjoy sovereignty and independence, and the consequent mutual treaties and conventions, however the political relations between Turkey and Hamas are important because they are not symmetrical or equal relations, but rather relations between a sovereign state and an Islamic national liberation movement. At the same time, it comes at a time when the regional environment is distancing itself from Hamas which they no longer agree with and find to not agree with the general environment of Arab regimes, especially after the events known as the 'Arab Spring' revolts. In addition to that, the new Arab regimes established by the counter-revolutions do not accept Turkey, and especially the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, given in their view his closeness to and support of Hamas, and their freedom to move within Turkey, even opening up offices there after leaving Egypt and Syria given Hamas' stance on the revolutions there.

Turkey is more interested by the Palestinian issue in general, by its interactions in clashes with Israel as seen in Davos, the wars on Gaza of 2008, 2012, and 2014, as well as the Gaza Flotilla (*Mavi Marmara*) crisis. When the international and regional space became harder to navigate, Hamas found that both Turkey and Qatar vital supportive countries in more than one field, but Hamas believes that this support is not enough or reaching the needed or its ambitions as per policies and international situation (Yousuf, 2018). Hence, we can say that the impact of Turkey's Middle Eastern policy on the Palestinian issue during Hamas in power was affected related to the following reasons: The Israeli attack on the Gaza Flotilla was a weak point against Turkey, so later Turkey will not be able to act as a mediator between Hamas and Israel in the future.

### **Arab Republic of Egypt**

The negative Egyptian political position from such a role in the Palestinian issue, as the Egyptian regime sees that Palestinian issue is a monopoly only for Egypt and none others. The Turkish political position from the Egyptian coup was another reason for the strong Egyptian coup regime to reject any Turkish interaction on the Palestinian issue. To this end, we can notice that the Turkish role took a step back and became uninvolved as before the Palestinian issue. A fact all Palestinians realize is that the deterioration in Turkish-Egyptian relations after the military coup on President Mohammed Morsi had a negative effect on Palestinian and Hamas relations with Egypt too. This is evident in the fact that Turkish aid stopped arriving to Gaza via the Rafah crossing point. From July 2013 to the present, as diplomatic relations degraded between Turkey and Egypt; Palestinians are paying the price of this escalation; with Egypt dealing with Hamas and Gaza as an enemy given that its constituents have good relations with its political opponent in Egypt (Yousuf, 2018).

### **Qatar**

After the latter's victory in parliamentary elections in 2006; Qatar began supporting Palestinians in Gaza along with Turkey, Malaysia against the Israeli blockade. A positive step forward in the Hamas-Qatar relations happened during the Israeli war on Gaza in 2008-2009, when Doha called for an international summit for Gaza. For the first time, Khaled Meshal participated with the former Crown Prince of Qatar Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and the President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Qatar called for and offered \$ 250 million USD for rebuilding Gaza after the war (Al-Mughrabi, 2012), suspending the Arab initiative for peace,

ending all forms of normalization with Israel, and establish an Arab sea aid line for Palestinians in Gaza as soon as possible. This novel Qatari approach quickly established it as a main regional player in the Palestinian scene based on the Qatari's view of what was an unethical and illegitimate blockade on Gaza. Qatar's strategic depth to Hamas has only increased significantly through the visit of the former Crown Prince to Gaza in October 2012, followed by his call for an Arab summit in March 2013 to seek reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. Qatar actively seeks a greater regional role by contributing solutions with a more balanced policy than other Gulf and Arab countries by hosting Hamas' political office.

#### **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)**

KSA welcomed victory of Hamas in 2006 elections and refused the blockade on Hamas and asked the international community to respect the election results as much as possible to achieve peace in the Middle East regarding the Arab initiative for peace ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs KSA, 2014](#)). After the military action took place in Gaza in 2007, which resulted the Makkah Agreement to form a Palestinian national unity government headed by Ismail Haniyya ([Shanab, 2014](#)), the agreement was not able to break the West's refusal of not dealing with the Palestinian national unity government that Hamas represented. It seems that the USA, Israel and a number of Palestinian parties attempted to derail the agreement. The financial blockade on the Palestinian national unity government was not to take off regarding the conditions of Quartet which fired military clashes again. To this end, it was clear and reflected that Hamas felt comfortable with the Arab revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, particularly after their election victories. On the other hand, while Hamas was not ready or able to find alternatives. Moreover, Hamas was not able to succeed in re-establishing its relationship with the KSA while it was busy rearranging and strengthening relationships with Egypt, Turkey and Qatar. With the arrival of Brotherhood to power in Egypt; and the role of the KSA in supporting El-Sisi's military coup against the legitimately elected President Mohammed Morsi; the relationship of Hamas-KSA deteriorated severely given that Hamas was a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

#### **Islamic Republic of Iran**

Hamas identified a number of common principles with Iran towards Palestinian issue; which are: Palestine should be liberated from the occupation, not to recognize Israel anyway, supporting Palestinian resistance beside the Islamic ideology for both regardless of the different doctrine. To this end, Iran evaluated Hamas as a political and military Islamic Palestinian movement and decided to establish a relationship with it in order to find a gate for its role into the Middle East and the Palestinian issue, while using Hamas as a pretense for fixing its distorted image among the Sunni Arab and Muslim people. The relations between Hamas and Iran are due to Hamas thought it is open to the Arab and Islamic world, considering the Palestinian issue is an Arab and Islamic issue. Hamas needs weapons and military aid, against Israel as occupation forces. Moreover, Iran needs the Palestinian issue for its regional role. After Hamas won in PLC elections and formed the Palestinian government in 2006; Tehran offered good support to Hamas against the Israeli blockade and aggression, Hamas became a part of the resistance circle as much as Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. But the uprising in Syrian in spring 2011 and support of Hamas to the Syrian people for freedom, Iran's aid cut-off to Hamas and shifted to the Syrian regime ([Farahanah, 2014](#)).

There are number of factors had an effect Hamas-Iran relations such as the revolts in Arab countries which formed a strategic turning point, which highly affected regional relations, not only for coming Islamists in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt to the power; but also for bilateral relations of Hamas-Iran. This presented real and suitable alternatives for Hamas instead of Iran, while another factor is The Syrian revolution; from the first day; Hamas decided to stand beside the public movement calling for freedom and democracy, which has deepened and widened the gap between Hamas and Iran ([Farahanah, 2014](#)).

#### **Republic of Syria**

The Hamas leadership realized that the position of the Syrian regime towards the resistance is one of support. The regime allowed the movement's leaders to use the Syrian lands in training their members. Hamas agreed with the Syrian regime on its positions not to recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation, to reject American hegemony over the region, to adhere to the Arab and Palestinian right in the occupied territories, and for resistance to be the right of the Palestinian people in restoring their legitimate rights. President Bashar Al-Assad was clear in

supporting resistance forces through his speeches at the Arab summits in which he was participating (Arab Summit of GAZA, 2009). The political support December 28<sup>th</sup> 2008 during Ismail Haniyya's tenure in government. The representative of Syria in the Arab League defended Hamas in the official Arab meetings at the headquarters of the Arab League, and prevented the criminalization and condemnation of the Hamas movement in the Arab world after the events of the Palestinian division. Moussa Abu Marzouq said that "The leadership in Syria informed us of all the positions that concern our cause. This gave us an insight into the political reality in the region. This helped us form a vision in our relations and helped the movement understand the political reality and the positions" (Hanene, 2015).

The Syrian regime contributed to opening new doors for Hamas in its relations with others from various international parties, which led to an increased political presence, the development of its relationship and its opening up to new international parties. The Syrians arranged a three-way meeting between Russian President Medvedev and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, as well as Khaled Meshal, head of the Hamas movement in May 2010, while further arranging for other meetings with European parties in the palace of President Al-Assad, encouraging visitors to meet with Hamas leaders and have relations (Aljundi, 2017).

#### **United States of America (USA)**

The international community, particularly the USA does not encourage for Turkey to have a role in the Palestinian issue. This is for the reason that they know Turkey is headed by AK Party with sympathy for Hamas, and has offered a home for them with free movement related to a common Islamic ideology. US administration believes that democratic way that resulted Hamas and Fatah representatives are elected in democratic elections, does not mean the United States should agree to their decisions or accepting their existence in power, "President Bush will not recognize the government unless it meets the conditions of the Quartet" (Islamic Resistance Movement: Studies of Thought and Experience, 2017). The then US Secretary of State John Kerry said "The United States will study the politics of the Palestinian national reconciliation government day by day, in order to ensure that it does not exceed the borders". The State Department spokesman said that "The Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas formed a transition government of technocrats that does not include members linked to Hamas, we will judge this government through its actions" (BBC, 2014). This clearly means that the American view of point is rejecting any role or link to Hamas in the government even the government was a national unity government or led by Palestinian president Abbas, which was mentioned by President Bush said "The political party that clearly declares the destruction of Israel as part of its political program is a party we will not deal with" (US Department of State, 2006).

#### **Russia**

Hamas considers Russia a superpower with great influence on international politics. The movement is ready to open up to Russia if it serves the Palestinian interests without conflicting with its principles. They have been in contact over the years, especially since Hamas welcomes any party that tries to communicate with it, to achieve Palestinian aspirations for independence (Al-Monitor, 2017). However, Hamas is wishing to regain the Russian political point of view to its side on the basis of past relations; as Russia is a member of the International Quartet, which is not free according to Hussam al-Dajani, a political science professor at Al-Ummah University in Gaza. He stated that "Hamas relations with Russia could pave the way for the movement to regain its position as part of the political process in the region" (Al-Monitor, 2017). The point here is that the Russians gain from its mutual interest relations with Hamas that is Russia will improve and develop its image in the Arab and Muslims world through cooperation with Hamas as one of the largest Islamic movements fighting the latest occupation in the world. During meetings held between 2006 and 2016, it seems that Hamas wanted Russia to break the siege imposed on Gaza since 2006. In addition, this helps Hamas become more open to the world in order to ease international pressure (Al-Monitor, 2017). The goals of Hamas-Russian relations to avoid as much as possible the pressures that may come from international community and some regional regimes. Critically speaking, however; Hamas should not hold much optimism towards its relations with Russia which is a part of the international community, and conditional upon Hamas on addressing the requisites of the peace process, recognizing the agreement of Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel.

### **European Union (EU)**

In 2004; after a statement of Hamas that it would consider a long ceasefire if Israel would withdraw to 1967 borders; EU found a chance to deal with Hamas, which has been considered a gradual change in the EU's vision of Hamas. According to Javier Solana "We asked Hamas to change their vision and start work as a political party, the EU position can be changed if Hamas recognizes Israel, stops violations and adopts international agreements" (Solana, 2009). For its part, the Foreign Minister of the Republic of France Philippe Douste Blazy said that "The formation of the Palestinian National Unity government may open a new page in relations between the Palestinian Authority and the international community, which would make the international community more assertive in its requests to the PA to combat the activities of terrorist groups and to end all forms of violence against Israel" (New York Times, 2007).

The EU follows behind American foreign policy and is more concerned with Israel's interests than its interests in the Palestinian cause. The EU stipulated that its financial aid to the Palestinian Authority should continue to be conditioned by recognizing the State of Israel, rejecting violence and the fight terrorism. The EU which provides the largest amount of aid to the Palestinian Authority, could stop aid if Hamas wins the next Palestinian Legislative Council elections, which came two days after the US stopped its aid to the Palestinian government. Although; the European calls for dialogue with Hamas, is closer to collecting information, including a strategic shift in dealing with, even if Hamas did not accept the conditions of the Quartet. While the European Commission and the European Parliament focus on supporting democracy, human rights programs and fighting corruption.

### **Kurdish factor in Israeli pressure on Turkey**

The Israeli influence and relationship with the Kurds, especially after a deteriorated Israeli-Turkish relation which Israeli exploited to exert political pressure on Turkey and reach more waivers towards its three conditions for renormalizing the relationship. In this regard; Turkey found itself in a critical situation and going a step back in spite of unsatisfied step backwards taken with renormalizing the relationship, particularly with the fallout from Turkish civil society especially IHH. Israel is not satisfied in any way about the Turkish role in the Palestinian issue in spite of the significant amount of common bilateral trade amounting to nearly \$ 5 billion (Carmon, 2018). This is related to the fact that Israel believing Turkey is closer to Hamas and the Palestinian issue than to Israel. Turkey made a challenge to the international community by welcome for the won of Hamas followed by forming its government, in dealing with an unsatisfied government. Aside from welcoming a high-ranking Hamas delegation to Istanbul despite anger from US and Israel and do pressure on Ankara to not receive Hamas delegation (Cagaptay, 2006).

Turkey is one of the few in the region that recognizes Hamas administration in Gaza, with +\$ 400 million US \$ (The New Khalij, 2015) as some civilian projects to the Palestinians as the second financial supporter after State of Qatar which fund civilian projects in Gaza by more than \$ 710 million (Gaza Reconstruction Committee, Projects Report, 2015), and dealt with in spite of intl. community boycott. The fact is that Turkey became and still the first and leader country supporting Palestinian issue. It can be said that Turkey has been able to bring Hamas to its ranks on a number of political stances, not a tactical gain, but a strategic gain, such as the call to the international community to work with its elected government, as an accepted mediator between Hamas and Israel. The Hamas movement also has overwhelming popularity among Turkish citizens, given its struggle against the Israeli occupation which is not accepted by Turkish citizens, especially after the killing of ten Turkish citizens who were in a humanitarian mission to the smallest geographical spot besieged for several years, and the increase in attacks against the Palestinian people and Jerusalem. In addition, Hamas' stances towards the Turkish republic against the failed coup attempt on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and the economic sanctions Turkey is facing because of its stances in the region, such as on the Syrian crisis, increase its popularity among the Turkish populace. Still, the political relations between Turkey and Hamas movement are in need to develop the interests of both sides, in order Turkey to achieve an international standing on the Palestinian issue.

### **3. Conclusion**

The bilateral Turkish Palestinian relations is not a new relation as much as an old one, which is more important for both sides, for Turkey to try to achieve a place in a terrible middle east region

while other Arab regimes trying to move Turkey away from any effected position. In last years; Turkish foreign policy was not concentrated towards the Palestinian issue as a central issue for all Arab and Muslims world, beside that; Turkey was more concentrated and busier in Syrian crisis regarding to its Turkey's national security. Turkish Middle Eastern foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue should be more concentrated towards an active and implementable policy that gives Turkey a regional role, as this role will not be offered until a memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Egypt is reached, where Turkey can offer help with its influences on Hamas which is not as much as with Egypt. Thus, Turkey needs to obtain flexible foreign policy with regional countries that intersect with the Palestinian cause especially with the Egyptian regime, in order to be interactive with the Palestinian issue. This is for the reason that if Turkey stays out of the Palestinian circle of influence; it would mean less active diplomacy in spite of much action without realistic result. Thus, Turkey needs to reactivate its zero problems foreign policy with countries neighboring Palestine.

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