

Islamic Resistance Movement

Hamas

Studies of
Thought & Experience

Editor

Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

Contributors

Dr. 'Adnan Abu 'Amer	Prof. Ahmad Sa'id Nofal	Mr. Belal M. Shobaki
Dr. Hafez al-Karmi	Prof. Dr. Ishtiaq Hossain	Mr. Isma'il Haniyyah
Mr. Khalid Mish'al	Dr. Mohsen Moh'd Saleh	Dr. Musa Abu Marzuq
Prof. Mustafa Abu Sway	Dr. Raid M. H. Nairat	Mr. Sameeh Hammoudeh
Mr. Sami N. Khater	Prof. Dr. Talal 'Atrissi	Mr. Usamah Hamdan
Mr. Yousef Abu Alsuood	Prof. Yusuf Rizqa	



Chapter Sixteen

Hamas International Relations

Mr. Usamah Hamdan

Hamas International Relations*

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the bases of Hamas' foreign relations and their policies. It also examines the development of the movement's relationships as well as difficulties and challenges that it has faced since its inception in 1987; especially with its commitment to resistance and an Islamic approach. This is in addition to its refusal to recognize Israel and its rejection of its political hegemony along with the Israel lobby that supports it in tarnishing Hamas' image abroad. This chapter also discusses the impact of the American labelling of Hamas as a "terrorist" movement on the movement's foreign relations. Finally, this chapter comments on the successes and failures of the movement's foreign relations.

First: Bases and Principles of Hamas' Foreign Relations

At the beginning of its foreign relations, Hamas adopted a set of principles and policies, which constituted the main pillar of the establishment and development of these relations. And since the beginning of its political relations, and by studying the experience of political relations among Palestinian factions and forces in particular, and liberation revolutionary forces in general, the movement's leadership realized that the success of these relations and achievement of the desired goals would be dependent on principles that can be summarized in the following points:

1. The political relations of the movement are part of an integrated system of struggle against the occupation, which, although based on resistance in thought and deed, are integrated with the activities of armed resistance, and support their achievements on the ground politically.

* This is the text of a written interview conducted by Mohsen Mohammad Saleh from Beirut, Lebanon, with Usamah Hamdan in Beirut, Lebanon. The text was approved by Mr. Hamdan on 3/3/2014. The questions and answers were placed here in the form of titles to facilitate the readability of the text.

2. The movement's relations must be based on a strategic vision of a political action that has clear goals (provisionally and strategically). This vision must in turn arise from a strategy aimed at liberation.

3. To achieve this, the movement's political relations must be managed in a fully institutional manner that guarantees the consistency of the movement's political track, continuity of its political performance and the good functioning of its political relations. Furthermore, it should not be adversely affected by changes that may occur in the internal environment of the movement and in its leadership frameworks. It must also succeed in dealing with all the developments in the external environment, and be able to continue in the face of all challenges in the long battle with the enemy.

4. In this context, the interests of the movement's political relations always depend on the interests of the Palestinian people and their cause. And regardless of the nature of the available political relations, and opportunities that may sometimes seem tempting, the movement's relations must not conflict or adversely affect the national interests of the Palestinian people and their cause.

5. Following this logic, benefiting from the lessons of the Palestinian experience is vital, beginning with the British occupation of Palestine up to the launch of the movement in 1987, through all the successes and failures on the path of struggle of the Palestinian people. The movement did not deal with the Palestinian political relations' negatively, or from the premise that what the others did was wrong, but dealt with them in terms of patriotic criticism, benefiting from successful experiences, while working hard to overcome its missteps and mistakes.

6. Hamas' faith in the Palestinian people's dedication to their nation has occupied an important place in the management of the movement's political relations; as it has always believed that the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab and Muslim nations. In this sense, these nations represent the Palestinians' strategic depth and the main protector and supporter of their cause. There is also a human dimension that motivates much of the world's free people to support the Palestinians, their cause, resistance and struggle.

7. Finding what is common in the relationships, agreeing on points of convergence, then working to consolidate and expand them, whatever differences there may be, constituted the basis for building the movement's political relations, for total agreement cannot always be attained. It was important for Hamas to

establish early on that differences in positions or visions toward issues other than the Palestinian issue must not be an obstacle to building relationships that serve the Palestinian cause.

8. In the context of its political relations, the movement has always been keen on the independence of its decisions, while remaining part of its nation, and keen on the rejection of dependency in any of its political relations. It has always refused to be under the wing of a party or a group, whatever the state of harmony and good relations between them. Also the movement has refused to build any kind of relationship on the basis of exploiting it or its performance for the political benefit of agendas that may conflict with the movement's principles, the nation's interests, or the benefit of humanity in general.

9. In all its political performance, Islamic ethics and principles have predominated. The movement has succeeded in carving a new experience in building and managing political relations. It dealt with all components and with the needs of political work and its details, without being contradictory or inconsistent with the Islamic system of values, ethics and principles.

Standards and Principles of Hamas' Foreign Relations Building

In accordance with the principles and foundations upon which Hamas started building its foreign political relations, it has adopted a number of policies in establishing, managing and developing its foreign relations at regional and international levels. The most important of these policies can be summarized in the following points:

1. The "Zionist entity" is the only enemy of the Palestinian people and their resistance forces, among which Hamas includes itself. Hostility to it stems from its occupation of the Palestinian territories and its usurpation of the rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the movement has no problem in dealing with any regional or international party; the only party with which it does not deal with is the one that occupied the Palestinian territories, destroyed Palestinian life, and displaced the Palestinian refugees.

2. The movement has adopted an open approach, based on Palestinian national rights, and in the context of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and on the basis of ending the occupation.

3. The movement is committed to the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of states under any circumstances.

4. The movement has built its relations on the popular and official levels in a manner that maintains its relationship with the Palestinian state and its institutions. It also established relations at the grassroots level, aware of the importance of public relations. The movement has succeeded in achieving this through transparency in its relationships. Moreover, the movement's policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of states was important for its success in building official and popular relations simultaneously.

5. Hamas' relations with other States are not directed against other countries or parties, rather they are relations directed to the benefit of the Palestinian issue and the Palestinian people. Thus, Hamas cannot be part of an axis fighting a battle against a bloc or another axis at the regional and international political levels; it rather seeks to maintain its relations with everyone based on the support of the Palestinian issue.

6. Clarity in the movement's political positions and vision, which gained it important credibility at the level of political relations.

7. Hamas' work takes place within the occupied territories. It is active there directly against the occupation on the land of Palestine. Thus, the movement does not exercise military action against any country or on the ground of any country. This policy has led to the realization of all regional and international parties that the resistance against the occupation is not pointless, or a mere desire to fight, it is an action of national struggle directed against an occupier. In spite of all the accusations leveled by the West (US and Europe) against the movement, this policy has had generally a positive supportive impact on the external relations of the movement.

8. The form and nature of bilateral relations are determined in accordance with the parties with which the relations are established.

Second: External Difficulties and Challenges

The process of building any party's political ties faces a number of difficulties and challenges; in that, Hamas was no exception. It faced and still faces a number of difficulties and challenges, some of which are associated with the political

and regional environment, and some with the movement's own subjective circumstances and the evolution of its performance and growth. These challenges can be reviewed in the following context:

1. The Launching Phase (1987–1990)

The movement's emergence on the Palestinian political scene was as a national Palestinian faction with Islamic reference; the challenges then were mainly Palestinian. For the Fatah movement and the PLO were not happy with this development in the Palestinian political environment, especially that the announcement of the launch of Hamas coincided with the start of the blessed *Intifadah* (an appellation that had spread in that period, and was adopted by Hamas). This took place in an Arab political environment that, in the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, viewed the Palestinian situation as a burden. Fatah and the PLO leadership were under conditions of political volatility and anxiety, which arose from their fear of an end to their political role, and were under pressure to join the occupation in a political process. However, it was not acceptable for it to be engaged in such a process directly, but through representatives from the Palestinians of the interior and through a regional role led by Jordan. In spite of its readiness to do that through Arafat's 1983 visit to Cairo, followed by the Palestinian-Jordanian understanding of 1984, the Fatah and PLO leadership was not ready to accept what could lead to the formation of a Palestinian leadership that could replace it, or even to accept the existence of competing national political symbols.

With the launch of the first *Intifadah*, this leadership felt that it had a golden opportunity to consolidate its leadership and command of the Palestinian people and to engage in the process of direct political settlement with the occupation. However, the announcement of the launch of Hamas created two main challenges for this leadership; the first was in the legitimacy of leadership, where the movement was launched in the occupied territories, and was based on the historical and deep legacy of the Islamic movement inside Palestine. The second was the refusal of this movement to come to a settlement with the enemy, and its call for jihad for the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea, which constituted a challenge to the theory of "land for peace."

At the time, the Fatah and PLO leadership tried to tarnish the image of Hamas and to turn Arab and Islamic parties against it, in the hope of isolating it politically in order to deal with it as a strictly internal Palestinian matter. In spite of all that

the PLO leadership did then, the impact of these efforts remained limited due to Hamas' closeness to the Arab and Muslim public, which welcomed the launch of Hamas and regained the hope of liberation following the events of (1982–1986).

Although the movement used to carry out its political activities from the beginning, the formation of its first specialized political committee took place in 1989; when it laid the foundations of its work and defined its responsibilities. It followed political and media developments, and made many studies and proposals. It also tried during the same year to arrange some political meetings and send delegations to some countries. The first attempt was a meeting with the Iraqi leadership, which did not transpire.

2. The 1990–1992 Phase

This phase, however short, was characterized by two major events that left a significant impact on the Palestinian issue and on Hamas' political relations.

The first event was the occupation of Kuwait and the subsequent US-led Operation Desert Storm; while the second event was the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference. The first event allowed a significant presence of Hamas at a political level; when the movement participated in the Arab mediation delegation, which sought to end the occupation of Kuwait through an Arab peace settlement. This gave the movement the opportunity to be present at the Arab political level, especially with the Arab Gulf countries, in particular KSA and Kuwait, in addition to Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Yemen and Sudan, through visits to the capitals of these countries. Hamas also began developing contacts and holding meetings with representatives of other Muslim countries (Iran and Pakistan).

With regard to the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference, Hamas saw this conference as a threat to the Palestinian issue, especially as it came in the wake of Desert Storm, one of the political effects of which was to weaken the PLO's political position, causing division in the Arab world that weakened the Arab position in general.

In late 1991, Ibrahim Ghushah was appointed the official spokesperson for Hamas. At this stage, the movement sought to establish relations with all the parties who inquired about and got to know Hamas, its ideas, intellectual concepts and political vision. While the positions of others were positive to the extent of openness and responsiveness with the movement's quest to build these relationships.

About two weeks before the end of 1992, Israel deported 415 Islamic leaders from the WB and GS, 385 of them affiliated with Hamas and 15 with the PIJ. Their humanitarian case, their steadfastness in Marj al-Zuhur and their rejection of their expulsion meant their cases took on global dimensions. This event proved a quantum leap for Hamas' political and international media work.

3. The Oslo Phase (1993–2000)

The convening of the Madrid Peace Conference on 30/10/1991 was a turning point for the Palestinian national struggle. The Arab and international consensus in supporting the conference at that time, and Arab participation in it, had an impact on the relations of the movement that had rejected the conference, considered it a threat to the Palestinian issue, and believed the goal of the conference was to liquidate the Palestinian issue. The Oslo Accords at the end of 1993 appeared to confirm the soundness of the stance adopted by the movement.

Despite the skepticism of many parties about the possibility of achieving peace, the regional and international communities stood by the peace process, especially after the formation of the PA in the Gaza-Jericho Agreement, which was then expanded to many areas of the WB.

Although relations with the Arab world have not witnessed any alienation, they have seen reservation and a cooling of relations from a number of Arab parties. Things went as far as the participation of many of these parties in the Sharm el-Sheikh conference of 1996, which aimed to halt the growing power of Palestinian resistance, especially Hamas.

In contrast, relationships at the regional level have expanded and developed with a number of Arab states, as well as with Iran.

The steadfastness of the deportees in Marj al-Zuhur had significant impact on the movement's political relations, as it pushed forward contacts with several Arab countries. It also opened up important horizons in the relationships with some Muslim countries. Furthermore, Hamas had a number of contacts with western embassies in Jordan, in an attempt to support the cause of the deportees and their return. Thus, some contacts were made and meetings were held with the ambassadors of Britain, Germany, Italy, and Norway, and with the political advisor at the US Embassy. However, in late March 1993, the US State Department issued a decree banning contact with Hamas, while other Western countries tended toward freezing contacts with the movement.

At the end of this phase, following a failed assassination attempt on the head of the movement's political bureau Khalid Mish'al in Amman, and in light of the political embarrassment caused to "Zionist entity" by this attempt, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin was released from prison; he then left GS for medical treatment. The movement succeeded in arranging a trip for him across a number of Arab countries including: KSA, Qatar, Iran, Kuwait, UAE, Syria, Sudan, and Egypt. This tour had positive effects on the movement's relations and opened up numerous prospects in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Moreover, Sheikh Yasin received an invitation to visit South Africa, which was later cancelled following pressure from the Palestinian Embassy there.

This phase had the following key characteristics:

- a. Coldness of major Arab parties in dealing with the movement, which constituted a challenge to its ability to maintain its relations with them without a negative impact on its resistance agenda against the occupation. It can be said that it has succeeded in overcoming this challenge without making any concessions on its agenda and goals. Hamas was successful in avoiding a distracting battle with Jordan in 1999, after Jordan had decided to cut its relations with the movement and arrest the head of its political bureau and a number of its members.
- b. Development of its relations with Iran and some Arab parties. This phase also witnessed the movement's leadership focusing on those parties that support its agenda, raising its relationship with them to the highest possible level.
- c. The beginning of contacts and relations with some African countries.
- d. Hamas was placed on the American list of terrorist organizations, a response to Israeli demands, to put pressure on the movement and force it to respond positively to the political settlement reached in the Oslo Accords.

4. *Al-Aqsa Intifadah* Phase (2000–2005)

In light of the failure to reach a final peace solution (as was agreed in Oslo) and in light of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* and the rise of Hamas' resistance activities, this phase witnessed major developments in the movement's political relations.

The movement proved its ability not only to withstand difficult conditions (1993–2000), but also to raise the level of confrontation with the occupation and penetrate its security measures and red lines. In parallel, it provided political initiatives consistent with its resistance activities (the pacification of 2003, the

concept of truce and pacification in 2005, and the declaration of its participation in the PLC elections).

In light of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the movement developed its political relations, and strengthened its relations with its allies.

Hamas advanced its relations with a number of regional parties, despite the deadlock, which had affected them during the previous phase, especially those with Egypt. It has also managed to achieve important breakthroughs in its international relations by meeting officials from most EU countries. Thus, there were direct contacts with representatives of the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, and a number of unannounced, official visits to European capitals. There was also the beginning of direct contact with the Russian Federation, when a delegation from the movement was invited to visit Moscow in November 2005; and the visit took place in January 2006, the beginning of a relationship, which is still ongoing.

At this stage, Hamas had demonstrated its ability to form a wide network of relationships while continuing its resistance activities. The importance of the movement's ability militarily and among the population to consolidate its political role should not be overlooked. Moreover, the existence of alliances based on resistance to the occupation had important implications on its political relations.

However, this stage also saw unprecedented American pressure applied to the EU to add Hamas to the European terrorist list. Despite resistance from many EU countries, these pressures finally led to compliance in 2003. This move was rejected by the movement, which felt that it demonstrated political hypocrisy and double standards.

5. International Conditions Phase (2006–2007)

During this phase, Hamas participated in the PLC elections; the results surprised everyone when the movement won a comfortable majority of seats. But instead of responding to the Palestinian people's will, the US sought to undermine the movement's victory; releasing what was known at the time as "the Quartet conditions" for dealing with any government formed by or which involved Hamas. When Hamas rejected those conditions, international and regional parties interfered to prevent the formation of a government of national unity, which Hamas had sought; while these parties had bet on the movement's failure. In spite of

difficulties, the government formed by Hamas succeeded in persevering in the face of challenges, which led to the launch of the US-led scheme dubbed “the Dayton Project” aimed at the overthrow of the government formed by Hamas. In spite of the fact that Hamas had agreed to form a National Unity Government in the Mecca Agreement of March 2007, moves against the movement did not stop, being under US supervision and using Palestinian tools (Preventive Security Force—PSF). With a widening circle of assassinations and breaches of security, the government had to control and restrain the security forces. This was not really understood by President ‘Abbas nor did he respond to it as the head of PA and Fatah, in which he was required to abide by the Mecca Agreement. This stage ended with Palestinian schism and two governments, one in GS and the other in Ramallah.

Perhaps the most important challenge faced by Hamas at this time was the political siege imposed by the US and the Quartet on the Hamas government and the National Unity Government, and the deliberate confusion by these parties between the relationship with Hamas and that with the National Unity Government. In addition, the collapse of the Mecca Agreement had a negative impact on the KSA-Hamas relationship.

At this stage, the movement gained great support from its allies, as well as the support of Arab parties that appreciated the movement’s role and its impact on the national level. These parties sought to build a positive relationship with the movement, despite the effect that the schism had on these relations later.

International relationships, despite the blockade, continued to develop with the Russian Federation and some European countries, some of which considered (despite their EU membership) that EU decisions were binding on EU institutions, and not on its member states. This phase also witnessed the evolution of the relationship with South Africa, and a series of contacts with a number of African and Latin American countries.

6. The Phase of Siege and War (2007–2011)

The US sought to tighten the screws on Hamas through the GS blockade. The occupation benefited from this siege and waged a serious attack on GS in December 2008. Many regional parties hoped for an end to resistance in GS and the crushing of Hamas during this operation, in which Ramallah saw an opportunity to regain GS.

Hammas steadfastness, public rallying around it, and the failure of Israel's invasion of GS, were an unexpected blow to the occupation, and a victory that boosted the movement's status and reflected its political relations regionally and internationally.

During this phase, the movement's regional relationships developed, its alliances becoming more firmly established, international relations widened, and it became the focus of European decision-makers. Furthermore, relations with Russia evolved to the level of official meetings with the president; and the relationship with the Chinese Communist Party began.

The efforts of activists from around the world to break the GS siege opened many channels with the movement. These efforts have shaken the stereotype that the "Zionist entity" has always tried to draw of the resistance.

7. The Arab Uprisings Phase

It is too early to talk about the effects of this phase on Hammas' political relations, for two reasons: the first is that it has not reached its end, and the second is linked to regional fluctuations and conflicts. The Arab uprisings mark a starting point for determining attitudes toward the movement; after its resistance project had been, for years, the basic criterion and perhaps the only one.

Possibly the most important challenge facing Hammas and its regional political relations, in light of the region's volatile environment, has been the great horizontal and vertical division, regionally and within each country. This is a challenge that has two aspects; the division fuels internal conflicts and weakens interest in the Palestinian issue; and the second is that there are attempts by many parties to involve Hammas in their quarrels and conflicts, which Hammas has decided not to get involved in.

The Role of Israel and its Lobby in Distorting the Image of Hammas Abroad

No doubt that Israel has looked with great concern at Hammas' international relations and contacts. We understand that placing Hammas on the US list of terrorist organizations in 1993 was done under pressure from Israel and the "Zionist lobby," which since the early nineties has focused its attacks on Hammas more than on all the other Palestinian factions combined, including those of the PLO. After the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, attacks by the Israel lobby on PLO factions declined, while its attacks on Hammas increased and escalated. The boldness and clout of the "Zionist lobby" in the US extended to launching an attack on former

US President, Jimmy Carter, despite all the political weight he enjoys at home, and his role in the signing of the Camp David agreement; this attack came after he met with Khalid Mish'al.

The “Zionist lobby” worked against Hamas in three parallel directions:

1. Hiding behind the issue of terrorism, working to tarnish the image of the movement and to present it, especially after the September 2001 events, as a terrorist movement; claiming that the American suffering following these events is parallel to that of Israel.
2. Exerting pressure on all politicians who expressed their understanding of Palestinian resistance and Hamas' conduct and stances. Putting pressure on all the politicians trying to make contact with Hamas or holding meetings with it, and on those who had met with the movement, regardless of their positions.
3. Exerting pressure on various media outlets in order to present the movement in a negative light, taking advantage of the stereotype lingering in the mind of the American public of the Palestinian struggle and the Arab character.

With respect to Europe, the efforts of “Zionist” pressure groups had not realized the success that Israel required of them. So Israel resorted to the use of US pressure to include Hamas on the EU list of terrorist organization, after more than 10 years of Hamas' inclusion on the equivalent US list. It could be argued that the efforts made by Hamas and Palestinian civil society organizations, and by forces and parties in Europe that support Palestinian rights, have succeeded to a reasonable extent in clarifying many of the images that the “Zionist lobby” was trying to portray. They have also succeeded in securing some pro-Palestinian achievements, such as imposing a ban on dealing with companies working in or for Israeli settlements; in addition to the existence of a considerable number of Western and European universities that currently refuse to deal with Israeli institutions and universities.

Effective confrontation of the efforts made by the “Zionist lobbies” and the Israeli government requires unifying Arab and Palestinian efforts in this domain.

The Impact of Labelling Hamas a “Terrorist” Movement on Its Foreign Relations

No doubt that considering Hamas a “terrorist” movement has had an impact on its foreign relations, starting with the US and the countries that are committed to

American policies, namely its neighboring countries, Canada and Japan. And there is no doubt that classifying Hamas as a “terrorist” movement has greatly hampered the building of relationships with these countries and others with similar policies. In addition, these countries did not make attempts to understand Hamas’ positions, remaining committed to those of the US.

There are many European countries that have dealt with Hamas and began to form impressions different than those of the US. However, these countries, and as a result of American pressure and accusations of the movement being a “terrorist” organization, have not made their relations with Hamas public. Although we believe that the US knows and has intelligence about the Hamas-Europe communications that have taken place. However, accusing the movement of “terrorism” has made it impossible for politicians in these countries to publicly disclose, in a clear manner, their relations with the movement.

There are other countries that did not care too much about the American position but were subjected to incessant US pressure that impeded the smooth growth of these relationships. And here it must be noted that there is a fourth category countries; those that have been able to face American pressure and were able to deal with Hamas in a clear, public and open manner, and these relations continue to exist and grow.

Overall, accusing Hamas of “terrorism” has left an impact on the movement’s relationships with the countries that tie their policies wholly or partially with those of the US or are America’s close allies in the region. Charging Hamas with “terrorism” has not left a significant impact upon populations, who often realize that this charge is politically motivated and has little to do with reality. The public was often responsive with the Hamas’ clarification of some of these accusations, and there are even some parties that defend Hamas or support it in one way or another. The popular dimension has been more able to distinguish between the political stance and Hamas being actually a “terrorist” movement.

Are Hamas’ Islamic Devotion, Its Commitment to the Resistance Program, And Its Refusal to Recognize Israel, Obstacles in the Way of Its Foreign Relations?

Hamas being a national liberation movement with an Islamic reference was problematic for the movement from the outset. The context of Hamas’ development

remains a negative attitude toward Islamists among Western political elites. Confusion in communications with US personalities and institutions would turn into surprise when they actually dealt with the movement. What they would see is quite different from the stereotype they had envisioned. They discovered the rational role of Hamas as a national liberation movement, with resistance being its choice of policy in the response to the occupation; while the language of its political discourse, argument and vision was clear which did not contradict with the values adopted by the West, in terms of democracy, freedom, self-determination and human rights. The movement was able to create a positive impression on these parties about the nature of its religious commitment, which gave the movement credibility and suggested that the Islamic Movement's commitment has a positive and not a negative effect, as propagated by pro-Israel propaganda. Russia, China, Latin American and African countries were not deterred by the Islamic reference of Hamas. Indeed, the movement seemed to gain respect for its Islamic commitment, and esteem for the movement's respect for the values of the society to which they belong.

The conditions set by the US after Hamas' victory in the 2006 elections, under the name of the Quartet's conditions, had an impact on the movement's external relations, particularly at the international level. All international parties, even those that maintained a positive relationship with the movement, sought at first to persuade it to declare its acceptance of the conditions; the movement was clear in dealing with this issue. It stressed that these conditions were designed to disrupt its political role after it won the elections, which was a surprise to Israel and the US, and that the demands made by the Quartet were conditions to which Yasir 'Arafat had committed the PLO since the eighties, yet they neither achieved the promised settlement nor did they resolve the Palestinian issue.

Thus, the first stage was that of discussing these conditions and clarifying the movement's position toward them. This phase led to an understanding on the part of many parties, but they did not affect any change in the Quartet's conditions.

The second stage in confronting these conditions was to confirm that the movement would continue to adhere to its fundamental principles and bolster its field capabilities. There is no doubt that clinging to these fundamentals, including refusing to give up Palestinian rights and insisting on resistance, was reinforced as the movement's basic position, especially following its steadfastness during the Israeli aggression "Cast Lead Operation" in 2008/2009, and in the subsequent

attack in 2012. The movement also assured all parties that the pressure concerning the Quartet's conditions would not yield results. From the beginning of 2013 to the time of writing, international pressure on Hamas to accept these conditions has receded; the reasons for that are manifold, in particular Hamas' steadfastness in the face of pressure and aggression, the stalemate in the peace process, and spiraling changes that have led to instability in the region.

Third: Development of Hamas' International Relations

In its international relations, Hamas has focused on the official and party dimensions. In spite of the role of institutions in the political decision-making process, the transfer of power and democratic life in those countries impose on the movement the necessity to build relationships with active parties and civil society forces. So one of Hamas' approaches in its building of international relationships was paying attention to official institutions (the Foreign Ministry, the Presidency of the State or the Government, etc.) and in parallel, to institutions of civil society and political parties.

Hamas' leadership laid down a set of rules for the development of its international relations, which can be summarized as follows:

1. International relations are governed by the same principles and policies that govern Hamas' political relations.
2. Despite the importance of international relations in the movement and the need to win friends and supporters for the achievement of our rights, this cannot be achieved on the basis of concessions that affect the national rights of our Palestinian people or the project of resistance and liberation, being a Palestinian national project.
3. The main factor in international relations is acquiring power, power on the ground in connection to our people and our rights, power in the face of the occupation through resistance and steadfastness, and power in the depth of our connection to our nation as Hamas' strategic depth and its connection to the party.
4. Grasping the magnitude of "Zionist" infiltration and means of pressure in the international environment, and the need to confront this infiltration with methods that fight its effects as much as possible.

5. International relations should not be limited to the West, in particular the US and certain European countries. The circle should be widened enough to embrace all the world's continents, thus Asia, Africa and Latin America should be included as well.
6. Relations will not succeed if their logic comes from a narrow mentality that seeks to tame the Palestinian side into accepting the occupation or change in order to suit the peace process and its conditions. For political relations to succeed, they must take place in the framework of understanding the principles, grasping the rights of the Palestinian people, and agreeing to deal with Hamas as it is, and not after undergoing a rehabilitation process that did not succeed with other parties.

These principles have helped push forward the movement's relationships in many directions, yielding the development of relations with Russia, East Asia, Africa and Latin America. In addition, these principles made the movement careful in building its relationships on solid foundations, without any rush, for it may upset the balance required in such relationships.

Hamas began its international connections (via the embassies of some countries in a number of Arab and Islamic capitals) in 1993. These connections included contacts with the embassies of the US, Britain, and France, in addition to a number of other European countries. Some of these contacts were initiated by the embassies of these countries.

The movement decided to excuse itself from continuing its meetings with the US Embassy unless the level of these meetings evolved and their manner changed. Before long, the US decided to place Hamas on its terrorism list, due to its adherence to the resistance and rejection of the peace process then. This led some European embassies to stop their communication with Hamas in Amman, while contacts of many other European embassies continued through their representatives in Tehran, Khartoum and Beirut, but remained limited to communications concerning developments and events. In 1995, some European parties initiated contact with Hamas in an attempt to persuade the movement of the importance of participating in the presidential and PLC elections. Hamas insisted that it would not participate in these elections, as a democratic expression of its political position.

In 1998, with the start of the preparations for the "final status" negotiations, Hamas received a letter from Germany carried by the senior adviser to its Prime

Minister at the time. The letter's intent was to urge the movement to support the efforts of the peace process, promising it a role in the negotiations and in the administration of the PA, and a role in the final settlement should it agree. The year 2000 witnessed the opening of contacts with many European capitals, in particular the countries of the Mediterranean basin, in addition to Switzerland and Norway.

1. Hamas and the United States

In its political relations, Hamas had a clear vision and a political horizon open to relationships with all the components of the international community, while keeping in mind that the Israeli occupation is the enemy that Hamas and the Palestinian people face. In this spirit, Hamas has dealt with all sides of the international community. However, the US has always dealt with Hamas according to Israeli calculations. Thus, the inclusion of Hamas on the US terrorism list came after Israeli pressure, and the inclusion of Hamas on Europe's list of terrorist organizations came after American pressure in favor of an Israeli demand that had not found a European response.

Following the events of September 2001, the negativity of the US position increased. The lack of a specific definition of the term 'terrorism' worsened America's approach. Thus, any contact with Hamas by a US citizen became a crime punishable by US law and the judiciary.

Despite that, meetings were held with American figures (who have no official positions) even if they had official positions in the past. All of these meetings had a green light from the authorities; most prominent among them was the meeting with former President Jimmy Carter in 2008 after President Obama won the Presidency.

[American] officials met with Hamas on numerous occasions, stressing the need not to make public these meetings, despite the fact that they had their superiors' approval.

Relations with the US can be assessed as follows:

- a. The US has dealt with Hamas in terms of Israeli interests, and to date this rule still applies in this administration's dealings with Hamas.
- b. Despite the openness shown by many American personalities that held meetings with the movement, the US did not deal with an open mind in understanding Hamas' positions. It has always resorted to pressuring Hamas into accepting its conditions.

- c. Contacts between the two have failed to achieve a serious breakthrough in their relationship, because the US has insisted that embarking on a relationship with Hamas is conditional on Hamas' acceptance of Israeli conditions.

2. Hamas and European Countries

European relations have been affected dramatically by two main events; the first one occurred when, in the wake of *Al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the US pressured European countries into placing Hamas on the "list of terrorist organizations." Despite the fact that putting Hamas on the list has prevented EU institutions from contacting it, that did not prevent many European countries from having such contacts. The most significant impact of the blockade in the first months was freezing European countries' contacts with Hamas; which were soon resumed after the second event took place, namely, the Palestinian elections.

In spite of the international Quartet's conditions, Europe considered contacts with Hamas to be important, especially after it had won the elections. They saw that refusing to deal with it would pose obstacles or will abuse the image long advocated in Europe with regard to democracy and peoples' freedom to choose by respecting election results.

In the following, we point out some of the factors affecting European relations with Hamas:

- a. Europe does not have its own political role; rather European countries play roles that do not go beyond the US-set ceiling, thus weakening their role in the Palestinian issue and the Middle East in general. Nonetheless this role cannot be European in so far as there are general policies, and every country acts according to what it believes to be in its interest.
- b. The overall European role is rejected by Israel, so it comes in specific contexts that do not conflict with Israeli and US interests. Thus, Europe remains incapable of playing an active role; its role being almost confined exclusively to filling the vacuum of the American role, when the US is incapable of making any progress, either focusing on other priorities, or preoccupied with hotter crises.
- c. In the "peace process," Europe plays the role of a financier rather than broker, thus its role is not key.
- d. Nevertheless, Hamas has been keen to have positive relationships with European countries; and it is premature to disclose any information on these relationships

due to a mutual commitment between the two sides not to disclose them. It could be argued that since 2006, growth and development in these relations has occurred. There are countries that do not mind revealing such relations, like Switzerland and Norway. But there are other countries which always deal with the movement at formal political levels, having more than mere contacts with it; of this type there are five EU countries.

Hamas is keen to develop these relations and is exerting political effort at the time of writing to take the name of the movement off the European “list of terrorist organizations.” And, despite the fact that some European countries are cooperating in this matter, there is still a European law decreeing that such a decision should be in consensus. Furthermore, there are some new EU countries that prefer to comply with the US administration’s policies rather than be closer to the European policies.

3. Hamas and Russia

There is variation in these relationships, despite the fact that these countries belong to the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). However, Hamas’ relations with Russia began in 2005; and it is to be noted that the Russian leadership in the person of President Vladimir Putin had called for the establishment of these relations before Hamas entered the elections. In the wake of the movement’s declaration that it would enter the elections, contacts began with it, as a Hamas delegation visited Russia and had preliminary official meetings there.

After its election victory, Russia invited Hamas to visit and, in early March 2006, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev met a delegation from the movement in Moscow, headed by Khalid Mish‘al. Afterwards, meetings evolved between the two sides, and there were many visits and contacts at various levels, culminating in a meeting in May 2010 attended by Khalid Mish‘al, head of Hamas’ political bureau, and the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (who became president of Russia from 2008–2012) in the presence of President Bashar al-Assad. The relationship between the movement and Russia continues, based on mutual respect.

Russia has shown that it appreciates and understands the movement’s role; and it has the potential to play a better and more effective role for the Palestinian issue and in favor of the Palestinian people. Perhaps the most striking aspects of

this relationship is the multiple and successive meetings between the movement's leadership and Russian officials, in particular, the Russian Foreign Minister, members of the State Duma, assistants to the president and his Special Envoy for the Middle East. These visits were not dominated by Protocol and political dialogue; they rather surpassed that and involved serious and productive work to build understandings that serve the Palestinian issue and people.

4. Hamas and China

In the framework of China's commitment to build positive relations with the region, there have been the beginnings of a connection with Hamas, and some encouraging political meetings for the development of relations; particularly as the Arab collective memory is one of looking to China to be a support for the Palestinian issue at its different junctures. Moreover, it is expected that China will be a key player on the international scene over the next decade, as American challenges drive more than one party to re-examine its relations with the region. Therefore, it is expected that China's role as an international political player will be enhanced, and that in turn opens up the prospect of positive relations with it. Hamas will seek to develop its relationship with China further.

5. Hamas and India

At an official level, relations with India have been within the framework of initial contacts and cannot be classified as official ties. While relations at the party and civil society levels have grown at a positive pace and may have positive impacts on the official level.

The effect of the PLO's historical ties with India on any relationship at the Palestinian level must not be overlooked. Also we cannot neglect the Israeli effect on such relationships, as Israel has tried to use the terrorism issue to pressurize Palestinian relations with India in general. In spite of all of that, there remain chances to have relations with India, if we take into account the history of India's relation to and support of the Palestinian cause in various international forums, and the fact that Indian-Israeli relations are a relatively recent development.

6. Hamas and South Africa

As for the relationship with South Africa, it is one that can be described as good, and long-standing. After the termination of the apartheid regime, South Africa gave

the Palestinian struggle its support and endorsement. Furthermore, after Sheikh Ahmad Yasin was released from prison in 1998, he received a formal invitation to visit South Africa. However, the visit did not materialize due to pressure from the PLO and Yasir 'Arafat personally. In spite of that, the relationship between the movement and South Africa has evolved steadily; many meetings have been held at the leadership level. The head of Hamas' political bureau has met the vice president, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and a number of other senior officials. In addition, there have been many Hamas delegations that have visited South Africa, holding meetings with key figures there. These had a general framework of developing and strengthening relations between the two sides.

South Africa has shown clear interest in providing its expertise to the Palestinian side in the face of racist policies; South Africa is a model in conflict management against a racist entity that can be utilized in various key aspects of the struggle against Israel.

During the Israeli aggression on Gaza of 2008/2009, South Africa supported the Palestinian people and their resistance. The president of South Africa and the South African Parliament declared their condemnation of the aggression and stated that they stood by the Palestinian people in their right to resist the occupation. And in 2012, a number of official delegations visited GS; and in many of these visits to the Palestinian territories, they met leaders of Hamas. The two sides are seeking to develop and promote bilateral relations.

7. Hamas and the Countries of Latin America

Regarding Latin America, there are contacts with a number of countries there and regular meetings with a number of others, in particular Venezuela, Brazil and Cuba. Meetings have been held with a number of Latin American foreign ministers, and envoys were sent to the region, in addition to opening permanent channels of communication with a number of these countries. In spite of the considerable efforts made by the Zionist lobby to disrupt Latin American-Palestinian relations in general and relations with Hamas in particular, and the Israeli security penetration in this region, the chances of relations between the movement and Latin America are promising.

Fourth: About Hamas' Successes and Failures in its Foreign Relations

There is no doubt that in its foreign policy, Hamas has enjoyed successes on numerous issues and on many fronts. First, the movement has succeeded in providing a coherent political discourse that adheres to Palestinian rights and fundamentals, and to the resistance, while remaining in line with international law in terms of the right of people to freedom and self-determination. This has upset Israel and its supporters, because the movement's political stance in this area was solid to the point that it was not possible to respond to it with ease; rather a direct, serious response to it would have led to results that are contrary to what the "Zionist entity" and its supporters wish for.

The second point of success has been that the movement has, in general, dealt openly with its political relations, including its international relations. This has revealed capability and a high level of flexibility within the movement that has helped other parties form positive convictions about it, expressed by some and not expressed by others. It has been proven that Hamas is able to build relationships and to fulfill its commitments in the context of these relationships, without undermining its principles.

Furthermore, Hamas has been able to create and develop a network of relationships at international level, under attacks against it carried out by the "Zionist lobby" and attempts at disrupting its relations carried out by the PA and its embassies. This has been achieved in the context of a region containing many parties that have not dealt positively with it. So this is undoubtedly one of Hamas' successes.

Another one of the movement's successes has been its ability to develop a set of political relations that respected the privacy developed between the movement and the states. It has respected the desire of many countries to keep their relations with it undeclared, and that has yielded credibility and confidence in their relations with Hamas, and created an extensive network of relationships in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa.

Another of Hamas' successes has been its ability to combine relations at the official level with relations at the level of civil society institutions, and with figures

and forces with influence in the political environment. This has provided and continues to provide Hamas with opportunities to develop its political relations.

It is clear that the levels of the movement's relations in the international environment continue to vary widely, from countries with which the relations are in their initial stage, to countries with which the movement enjoys strong and solid relations. This enjoins the movement to employ various forms and tools, which may sometimes result in confusion.

Among the gaps that the movement has faced in its international relations, perhaps most significant has been the "accusation of terrorism" adopted by the Zionist lobby and the US, which became an obstacle to forming relations after the September 2001 events.

One of the challenges that the movement has faced in its international relations has been the attempt by numerous parties to link the level of its relations with Hamas to Hamas re-formulating its position and vision towards the peace process, instead of dealing with the movement as it is.

Also one of the challenges has been that relations with the international community need dynamics that differ from those needed in the environment of Arab and regional relations.

At one stage, its communication and media performance constituted one of the gaps in the management of the movements political relations.

Overall, the achievements of the movement in international relations had more positives than flaws. Dealing with the flaws, however entrenched, will lead to improvement in the level of the movement's network of foreign relations in general, and the international relations in particular.

This Book

The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas is a prominent Palestinian resistance movement. It enjoyed, and continues to enjoy, broad popularity in the Palestinian arena. Hamas adopts Islam as a creed, way of life, and a code. It belongs to the school of Muslim Brothers movement.

Credit for the idea behind this book is owed to the late Prof. Ibrahim Abu Rabi'. 17 academicians, researchers and senior Hamas leaders participated in writing the chapters of this book.

This book is indeed one of the most specialized references regarding Hamas thought and experience, and it is an indispensable source for those interested in studying the Movement. It committed itself to the methodologies of academic research and all this entails in terms of accuracy, objectivity, and documentation. The contributions by several Hamas leaders shed additional and up-to-date light on a number of controversial issues surrounding Hamas and its experience.

Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

Islamic Resistance Movement

Hamas

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مركز الزيتونة للدراسات والاستشارات

P.O. Box: 14-5034, Beirut - Lebanon

Tel: +961 1 803 644 | Tel-Fax: +961 1 803 643

info@alzaytouna.net | www.alzaytouna.net



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