

Chapter Eight

Hamas Relations with the Arab World

Dr. 'Adnan Abu 'Amer

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Introduction

Nearly 25 years after the establishment of Hamas, and its overcoming of many tests at the level of political relations, home and abroad, evaluating its experience in managing these relations has become a matter of great importance. Of particular significance is Hamas's relationship with its Arab surroundings, with both regimes and populations equally.

This study tackles the most important broad outlines of Hamas's policies in its Arab political relations, although these are subject to change with circumstances. Indeed, these relations might see convergence or divergence depending on goals and interests. This requires a number of questions to be answered, including:

- On what basis does Hamas establish its Arab relations?
- What are the policies and objectives behind these relations?
- What is fixed and what is variable? And are there shifts in its political practices in the context of those relations?
- Are there any conditions and concessions required from Hamas to establish relations with a given party, and are there any Arab parties that Hamas shuns, and rejects any relationship of any kind with?

First: The Determinants of Hamas's Arab Relations

Hamas proceeded to build its pan-Arab relations on the basis of its Charter, which states that the liberation of Palestine is linked to three main spheres, including the Arab sphere, and its role in the conflict and the duties that fall on this sphere. Hamas has considered that the

Arab countries surrounding Israel are requested to open their borders for the *Mujahidin* of the Arab and Islamic countries so they can take their role and join their efforts with their Muslim brothers of Palestine. As for the other Arabic and Islamic countries, they are asked to ease the movement of *Mujahidin* from it and to it.¹

¹ *Charter of Hamas*, Article 28.

Hamas sought to have official Arab parties stand by its side for

supporting it on all levels, taking up its position, pushing forth its activities and movements, and working to gain support... so the Islamic people can be its support and its victors—a strategic dimension on all levels: human, material, media, historical, and geographical. It works through holding supportive conferences, producing clarifying statements, supportive articles, purposeful pamphlets, and keeping the public aware of the Palestinian situation and what is facing it and what is being plotted against it, through educating the Islamic people ideologically, morally, and culturally in order to play its role in the battle for liberation.²

Perhaps what drove Hamas to seek this from Arab states and peoples was its conviction that the Zionist project posed a threat to the entire Arab nation. Given the religious and national dimension Palestine represents, the role of the Arab sphere in its liberation is pivotal and central, and constitutes the primary force upon which it is relied to undertake the burden of liberation, and is considered the parallel strategic depth assisting the Palestinian people in the liberation of Palestine and the removal of the Zionist entity from its land.³

Hamas benefited from the experiences of Palestinian factions in their pan-Arab relations by refraining from advancing any radical slogans against Arab regimes, such as the ones that permeated the Palestinian revolutionary climate in the late 1960s and early 1970s; for example the slogans that claimed that the “train of liberation” passed through this or that Arab capital! Hamas saw that Arab countries had to be kept on the Palestinians’ side, despite all difficulties and despite concerted Israeli efforts to isolate the Palestinian issue from the Arab dimension.⁴

To understand the nature of the relations Hamas has built with the Arab sphere, and evaluate whether they can be sustained and stabilized, it is necessary to consider the foundations and principles upon which they were established, and the political groundwork laid for them, as follows:

² *Ibid.*, Article 29.

³ Site of Encyclopedia Palestina, <http://bit.ly/2oBwstm>

⁴ Ahmad Fahmy, *Limadha Yakrahun Hamas?* (Why Do They Hate Hamas?) (Riyadh: Al-Bayan magazine, 2009), p. 19.

1. Reaching out to Various Arab Parties

Hamas was keen on establishing positive relations with Arab regimes, regardless of their political orientations and ideological affiliations, declaring its willingness to deal with the following forces: Islamic, Christian, Socialist, Leftist, and Liberal, to encourage them to do their duties and responsibilities toward the Palestinian people, support their just cause, and mobilize Arab public opinion.

Hamas was also keen on communicating with the League of Arab States and its secretary general in all events and summits. Hamas always sought to find common ground with the regimes, to increase coordination and collaboration. Hamas also sought ties with Arab organizations and institutions, based on the principle of “Giving priority to common grounds and areas of agreement over differences,” and establishing relations of full partnership among all Arab components. But Hamas believed that this joint Arab action must be based on commitment to the liberation of Palestine, and not recognizing the enemy or give it the right to exist on any part of it.⁵

Soon it became clear to Hamas that the progress and prominence it has achieved, both on the ground and among the public opinion, politically and militarily, increased the Arab parties’ interest in it. The stronger Hamas became, the more urgent it became for others to reach out to it, and to establish regional, strong, and mutual relations.⁶

2. Refusing to Intervene in Internal Affairs

Because Hamas is not part of the “internal” Arab political order, or the internal interactions in any Arab countries, it treads very carefully in a way that serves Palestinian goals. Indeed, the experience of the PLO is still something to avoid in the eyes of Hamas’s leaders, because the PLO’s leap into the arms of alliances and axes proved to be detrimental, having denied the PLO its will and identity. Meanwhile, its intervention in the internal affairs of other Arab countries,

⁵ Samir Sa’id, *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah Hamas* (The Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas) (Al-Mansoura: Dar al-Wafaa for Printing, Publication, and Distribution, 2002), p. 19.

⁶ Khaled Hroub, Nationalism and Islamism in Palestine: Unity or Division?, *Al-Hayat*, 3/10/2009. (in Arabic)

and alienating Arab regimes, only brought further losses and setbacks to the Palestinians and their cause.⁷

Thus, Hamas had a momentous task before it; to take advantage of overt and covert contradictions among the Arab countries and the disparity between their interests on the one hand, and on the other hand its ability to avoid being exploited by the regimes.

Over the years, Hamas was able to build parallel relations with both Arab governments and opposition. Many cite the example of strong relations with the Syrian government, despite the enmity between the latter and the MB movement, which reached bloody confrontations in 1982. Another example is Hamas's keenness on not provoking the Egyptian government under the regime of Hosni Mubarak, especially between 2000 and 2011, given Hamas's ties to the MB movement in neighboring Egypt.⁸

At the same time, Hamas refused to intervene in Arab countries in their policies, stances, and private affairs. It asserts its independence in taking "national Palestinian" decisions as directed by its leadership.⁹

However, some have condemned Hamas's flexible positions vis-à-vis the Arab regimes—easily recognizing them, and not participating in changing them—especially as it considers itself an Islamic movement that adopts supranational slogans, and realizes that the burden of liberation cannot be undertaken by the Palestinian people alone, nor by a fragmented Arab population.¹⁰

3. Not Starting Any Side Battles with Any Arab Party

Hamis has not pursued a hostile policy, but has expressed in an objective and committed manner its reservations and criticism of the positions of the various parties on the conflict with the occupation. It sought to find balance in its pan-Arab

⁷ Zaki Chehab, *Hamis min al-Dakhil* (Hamis from the Inside) (Beirut: The Arab Scientific Publishers, 2008), p. 187.

⁸ 'Adnan Abu 'Amer, *Al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi Qita' Gazzah bayna al-Da'wah wa al-Siyasah* (The Islamic Movement in Gaza Between Preaching and Politics) (Cairo: The Arab Information Center, 2006), p. 75.

⁹ Interview with Khalid Mish'al, Al Jazeera Channel, Doha, 5/3/2006. (in Arabic)

¹⁰ Iyyad al-Barghouthi, *Al-Islam al-Siyasi fi Filastin, ma Wara' al-Siyasah* (Political Islam in Palestine, Behind Politics) (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, 2000), p. 65.

political relations, while refusing to have its relations with any party to be at the expense of another, as long as they stand alongside the Palestinian people.¹¹

In the same vein, Hamas tackled its disputes with Arab countries with a lot of patience and prudence, avoiding accusation and defamation. It relied on objective criticism, advice, and appeal, without severing relations even in the darkest circumstances. Hamas never accused Egypt, opened a front with Jordan, or had its media outlets target the Gulf States.¹²

One may state that Hamas's pan-Arab relations were built on a clear strategic vision. Hamas was convinced that the Arab countries, which are growing weaker, are more prone to cave in to the American project. This means more restrictions against Hamas, which is indeed what happened after it won the legislative elections and became even clearer after it took control of GS in mid-2007.

Despite this, Hamas's discourse of mobilization called for Arab and Islamic unity, albeit it did not go into detailed ideological and intellectual aspects, contenting itself with broad slogans. For Hamas remained preoccupied with the resistance project, and there existed an extensive literature that covered unity issues. It is still worth bearing in mind that Hamas, in its literature and statements, has always expressed its interest in Arab unity, confirming that differences in opinion never justify infighting and divisions. Hamas believes that the arena of national and Arab work accommodates all visions and views on resisting the "Zionist project," and is convinced that the unity of the Arab and Muslim worlds is an objective that all Palestinian and Arab forces and personalities must work on to achieve.

At certain times, major Arab countries sought to antagonize, provoke, or instigate tension with Hamas, while the latter dealt with this prudently, and did not seek escalation in the media. Instead, Hamas limited itself to denying accusations, and tried to stay away from anything that could exacerbate these situation further in the media. It was patient despite the boycott of some Arab countries and their complete collaboration with US demands to limit financial and political relations.¹³

¹¹ Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi, *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987–1996*, p. 225.

¹² Ahmad Fahmy, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

¹³ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarah al-Siyasiyyah*, p. 159.

Hamas provided an example in suppressing anger against those who ignored its role and stature. It did not seek to defame them publicly, an important indication of its flexibility, and ability to prioritize higher interests over its own. Meanwhile, Hamas openly welcomed stances that were warm and cordial towards it, thus maintaining good ties and coordination with certain Arab countries.¹⁴

4. Limiting Armed Resistance to Palestine

Hamas adopts the strategy of using Palestine as the only arena for the armed confrontation with the occupation, and has refused to expand the geographical scope of its activities, despite the assaults it was subjected to abroad. In 1997, in Jordan, Khalid Mish'al, the head of Hamas's political bureau, survived an assassination attempt by the Israelis, who also assassinated 'Ezzedeen al-Sheikh Khalil, a Hamas operative in Syria, by detonating his car in 2004. Nevertheless, Hamas had a firm resolve not to move the theater of its operations outside the occupied territories.¹⁵ Hamas's vision and the stands it took reduced the fears of some Arab regimes, which always saw armed resistance as a destabilizing element of concern.

5. Calling for the Unity of Arab Forces and Rejecting Axes

Hamas has encouraged all efforts for Arab unity, coordination and joint action, which lie in the interest of the Arab nation and the Palestinian issue. Indeed, the Palestinian people will pay the price of Arab division. Hamas has looked warily upon the emergence of rival axes and alliances, refusing to become part of any of them, given its openness to all sides. Hamas is not affiliated to any party against another, and deals with everyone, not classing itself as being with one party against another. Despite this, Hamas is close to certain countries and distant from others.¹⁶

Unlike the experience of PLO, Hamas was able to remain outside the Arab axes. Despite the sharp disputes between the countries of the region regarding the relationship with Israel, Hamas benefited relatively from these contradictions, but

¹⁴ See Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi, *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987–1996*, p. 229.

¹⁵ Ghassan Charbel, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁶ Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi, *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987–1996*, p. 235.

without becoming mired in them. Hamas's realism, and its keenness to not veer away from the Palestinian and pan-Arab paths, was a source of Arab relief towards its policies. Hamas maintained its character, identity, and national agenda, showing on more than one occasion that it stood alongside the "Resistance Axis" opposed to the American-Israeli project, while maintaining good relations with other countries in the region. Perhaps its continuous contact with Gulf countries, its acceptance to go to the KSA in 2007 to sign the Mecca Agreement with Fatah, and its acceptance of Cairo's role as a mediator in Palestinian reconciliation and the prisoner swap deal with Israel in 2011, are all evidence of its openness to the "Moderate" axis.

Moreover, Hamas sought to build good relations with the countries of both axes, in spite of their differences. Hamas had no choice but to maintain balance in the relationship with them both. To be sure, Syria, until 2011, hosted Hamas's leadership abroad, while Egypt remained the only crossing for its leadership in Palestine to enter and leave GS. Meanwhile, both Egypt and Syria have been crucial players in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and for this reason, Hamas was keen on not excluding them from this conflict's equation.¹⁷

Hamas believed that the difference in positions with the Arab countries over political developments should not preclude contact and cooperation with them, especially those who are always ready to support the Palestinian people in their resistance against occupation. Hamas understood the importance of dialogue with all governments, parties, and forces, regardless of their political systems. It has had no qualms about cooperating with any side for the benefit of the just cause of the people of Palestine and their bid to obtain their legitimate right, or showing to the public the practices of the occupation and its inhumane measures against the Palestinian people.¹⁸

In the context of the axes, Hamas still walks a tightrope with the Arab countries. Neither did these countries fully open up to Hamas, nor did they close doors in its face. Stances that were unequivocal include those issued by some countries shortly after Hamas won the legislative elections as follows:

¹⁷ Khalid Fayyad, *Hamas and the Future of Political Developments in Palestine*, unpublished study, the Saudi Ministry of Culture and Information, 2007, p. 15. (in Arabic)

¹⁸ See Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, "Hamas 1987–2005, an Account of an Experience," in Turki al-Dakhil et al., *Harakat Hamas* (Hamas Movement), Book Series 20 (Dubai: Al-Misbar Center for Studies and Research, 2008), p. 67.

- a. The Syrian position saw Hamas's win as a victory for Syria's approach, with Damascus becoming the host of Palestinian legitimacy after being long accused of backing the opposition.
- b. The Qatari position truly welcomed the win, Hamas and Doha maintained warm relations for years.
- c. As for Sudan, the third Arab country to host Hamas, it is not easy for its leadership to ignore its Islamist roots.¹⁹
- d. On the other hand, the positions of Egypt and Jordan regarding the major Palestinian development seemed "cagey," albeit they could not conceal the anxiety they felt. These countries tried to combine their respect for the will of the Palestinian people with their tendency to support President 'Abbas and the leadership of the PLO, as a representative of Palestinian legitimacy. Egypt and Jordan did not abandon their broad and extensive Palestinian involvement, but they could not impose their vision on Hamas's leadership. However, Hamas, for many reasons, could not convince Egypt and Jordan that its new government was a qualitatively new addition to the Arab position, and that the time had come to conduct a real review of Arab policies, as the two sides had no choice but to coexist.
- e. As for the KSA, its relationship with Hamas is marked by overlap and some complexity. The KSA supports the head of the PA, President 'Abbas, and maintains close ties with Egypt (the axis of moderation), and there was always coordination between the two countries (until the end of the Mubarak regime) on various Arab affairs. The KSA also maintains strong ties with the Western powers, especially the US. On the other hand, KSA does not recognize Israel, and has no relations with it, and cannot put pressure on Hamas to accept American-Israeli conditions. It would also find itself in an extremely embarrassing position before Saudi public opinion should it cut off official or popular aid to Hamas in response to American demands, which means that its dealings with Hamas are smoother when compared to other capitals.²⁰

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²⁰ Zaki Shehab, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

Second: The Arab Determinants of the Relationship with Hamas

Relations between Arab countries and Hamas were like a game of tug of war, despite Hamas's desire for these relations to be warm and friendly. Hamas based its bid on political realism and it sought to achieve the best possible breakthroughs. Meanwhile, official Arab attitudes towards Hamas depended on overlapping factors, including:

1. The nature of the Arab regimes and their ideological and political backgrounds.
2. The geographical distance between these regimes and Palestine, and the geopolitical effect of the Palestinian issue on them.
3. Arab public opinion that must be brought back strongly to the heart of the Palestinian issue.
4. Hamas's ideological rigidity and the significant popular Palestinian support for its policies at home and in the Diaspora.
5. American and European pressure that targets Hamas in the Arab world.

All this has required Hamas to restore the link between Palestine and the Arab sphere, so that Palestine may become a permanent Arab responsibility, and the countries in question seeing that the new Palestinian position is conducive to Arab policies, rather than incompatible with them.

On the other hand, official Arab attitudes vis-à-vis Hamas varied between the following degrees:

1. Completely ignoring its existence, especially during the early phase that followed Hamas's establishment, which corresponded chronologically with the first *Intifadah* in 1987.
2. Accusing it of operating outside the framework of Palestinian legitimacy, with the consequence of thwarting the national Palestinian project and the peace process, which are adopted by the Arab regimes, especially Egypt.
3. Direct and explicit recognition of its strength, and formally inviting it to join the PLO, which is considered the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians.
4. Trying to contain it, weaken it, and marginalize it, especially by backing rival factions, mainly Fatah.

Arab stances towards Hamas differed. Some sought to preoccupy Hamas with side meetings tempting Hamas with promises of restoring relations and ending

tension, while others encouraged advancing some prominent members within it who had different attitudes and visions for a solution. A third faction sought to tie Hamas to a chain of support, trying to convince it of adopting prudence and calm, while a fourth faction adopted cruelty and inflexibility towards Hamas, perhaps to show it what would happen in the event of rebellion or objection.²¹

In the same vein, Hamas's pan-Arab relations underwent the three following historical phases:

First Phase: Between the time Hamas was founded, in December 1987, until late 1990, Hamas did not have official representatives or spokespeople abroad to express its views and platform. During this period, Hamas focused its work and efforts on the Palestinian arena, resisting the occupation, and maintaining the *Intifadah*, in addition to arranging relations with various resistance factions.²²

Second Phase: This began when Hamas appointed Ibrahim Ghushah as its official spokesperson outside Palestine, and when it was represented in the Islamic Popular Delegation comprising the leaders of Islamist movements, which visited Iraq, KSA, Jordan and Iran, shortly before the Gulf War, in January 1991, in an effort to reach a peaceful settlement between Iraq and Kuwait.²³

Hamas, in the aftermath of this crisis, launched itself into the external political and media sphere that now paid attention to the Islamic Resistance Movement, after its balanced attitude on the war had been met with much appreciation by most Arab countries.²⁴

²¹ See Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, "Hamas 1987–2005, an Account of an Experience," p. 87.

²² Yassir Qaddoura, Hamas's Relations in the Arab Region, *Filisteen Almuslima*, December 2007, p. 28. (in Arabic)

²³ 'Imad al-Falujji, *Darb al-Ashwak: Hamas-al-Intifadah-al-Sultah* (The Path of Thorns: Hamas-the Intifadah-the Authority) (Ramallah: Dar al-Shuruq, 2002), p. 70.

²⁴ Faisal Hourani, *Khuburat al-Harakah al-Siyasiyyah al-Filastiniyyah fi al-Qarn al-'Ishreen* (The Experience of the Palestinian Political Movement in the Twentieth Century) (Gaza: the National Center for Studies and Documentation, 2000), p. 422. It can be said that the First Gulf War in 1990/1991 impacted the political conduct of all Islamic movements in the Arab world, including Hamas. Indeed, these movements saw Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as reprehensible, but the invasion of foreign forces of an Arab country is also unacceptable. This attitude was detailed in the book: *Al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi Zill Azmat al-Khaleej* (The Islamic Movement in Light of the Gulf Crisis), authored by 25 leaders of Islamic movements, published by the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR), Chicago, 1991.

In the 1990s, Hamas's leadership settled in Jordan, with a spokesperson based in Amman, followed by a state of ebb and flow in the relations between the two sides. Hamas also strengthened its ties with Sudan, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Qatar, and Iran, opening both declared and non-declared offices in a number of these countries.

Third Phase: The eruption of the second *Intifadah* in September 2000, which saw a stronger Hamas presence in leading the uprising, with Fatah and the Arab regimes reaching the conclusion that Hamas could no longer be sidestepped when it comes to Palestinian decision making.

Fourth Phase: After the legislative elections in January 2006, with Hamas winning the majority of seats and going on to form the government, new trends in its pan-Arab political relations emerged. Hamas became a major pole in shaping Palestinian-Arab relations, where many factors pushed it in different directions and axes.

In this historical phase in particular, one can speak about the role of Hamas's political bureau abroad, and the tangible, strong support it provided Hamas, securing financial and political support, as well as popular and official backing.²⁵

Third: Hamas's Goals of Its Pan-Arab Relations

1. Expanding the sphere of Arab interest and participation in bearing the burdens of the Palestinian issue.
2. Affirming Hamas's presence in the Arab political arena.
3. Give the Arab parties clear briefings on its views.
4. Achieving political and media engagement, regionally and internationally, and facilitating its political activities in various countries.
5. Achieving convergence between Arab and Hamas's political attitudes.
6. Obtaining official recognition from Arab countries, resolving the problems facing the Palestinians living there, and securing various forms of moral and material support to help them.²⁶

²⁵ *Alittihad* newspaper, Abu Dhabi, 1/3/2006.

²⁶ Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi, *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987–1996*, p. 287.

Hamas did not seek more than it thought was attainable from its Arab surrounding, because it was aware of the hidden and open aspects of Arab attitudes towards it, and it understood clearly the importance of the Arab factor in determining the legitimacy of the Palestinian regime. Although it was keen on extending its hand to forge strong and serious Arab relations, the real question was: To what extent were the Arab countries serious in engaging Hamas and establishing relations with it? For how long would Hamas have to work to break the thick ice to activate, develop, and strengthen its pan-Arab relations?²⁷

After taking power, Hamas had a number of new interests with the Arab countries, including:

1. Maintaining a stable level of Arab support, especially financial support, in light of American and European threats to suspend aid. This constituted a major early challenge especially as the PA had a near complete reliance on aid and grants. Therefore, it is in its interests not to antagonize any side, but instead to seek to build good relations with everyone.²⁸
2. Strengthening its ties with Damascus, which supported it, welcomed its election win and was a major party in the Refusal Front. The rationale was that this would certainly ease local, regional, and international pressure on Hamas. Hamas also benefited from the presence of influential forces that back the resistance in Lebanon, led by Hizbullah and Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah.
3. Resolving to obtain "Arab legitimacy" after obtaining resistance-based and constitutional legitimacy, so that Hamas may be dealt with without maneuvering or caginess. This required boosting and developing relations.²⁹

To achieve these goals, Hamas set specific policies for its pan-Arab relations, based on the notion that the Palestinian issue is an Arab and Islamic issue, and not

²⁷ Fahmi Huwaidi, Look for the Conspiracy in the Tension Between Hamas and Arab countries, *Al-Khaleej*, 6/2/2006. (in Arabic)

²⁸ Iyyad al-Barghouthi, *Al-Aslamah wa al-Siyasah fi al-Arabi al-Filastiniyyah al-Muhtallah* (Islamization and Politics in the Occupied Palestinian Territories) (Ramallah: Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies, 2003), p. 42.

²⁹ Anwar 'Abdul Hadi Abu Taha, Faisal Darraj, and Jamal Barout, *Al-Ahzab wa al-Harakat wa al-Jama'at al-Islamiyyah* (Islamic Parties, Movements, and Groups) (Beirut: Arab Center for Strategic Studies, 2000), vol. 1, p. 235.

the concern of the Palestinian people alone, and that the Israeli threat endangers the entire nation, making Arabs responsible before their peoples for supporting the issue. Hamas also realized that it had to take into account the most prominent features of Arab reality, as follows:

1. The state of division, alignment into axes, and polarization dominating the Arab world, since the Second Gulf War and its ongoing negative effects on the policies and attitudes of the Arab countries.
2. The majority of Arab regimes have engaged in the peace process, while governments opposing the peace process are unable to influence things in the direction of an opposite policy, because of the magnitude of international support for the process.
3. The preoccupation of some Arab countries with internal, regional, and international disputes and conflicts, including: Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Algeria, Somalia, and Lebanon, which comes at the expense of combating the Israeli threat and the liberation of Palestine.
4. Weak material capabilities and heavy debts weighing down on many Arab countries.³⁰

Hamas drafted its policies based on the above, seeking to emphasize positive aspects, and limit negative ones, while clinging on to the fundamentals and inalienable rights of the Palestinians, and mobilizing forces to support the steadfastness of the Palestinian people until victory and liberation. Hamas succeeded in obtaining pan-Arab legitimacy, as a crucial step to become a key regional player, though it showed some flexibility in its political discourse and actions on the ground, causing controversy within its ranks over whether its concessions and flexibility were in vain or not.³¹

³⁰ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarah al-Siyasiyyah*, p. 171.

³¹ Muhammad Jum'a, "Hamas and the Arab Sphere," in Mohseh Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *Qira'at Naqdiyyah fi Tajrubat Hamas wa Hukumatih: 2006–2007* (Critical Assessments of the Experience of Hamas & its Government 2006–2007) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2007), p. 84.

Fourth: Obstacles Facing Hamas's Pan-Arab Relations

After Hamas's engagement in governmental and parliamentary political action, its relations with Arab countries faced a number of ideological issues and practical obstacles. Before that phase, its political discourse did not contain "diplomatic terms, accommodating interests, and mandatory formalities."³²

These obstacles and problems may be summarized as follows:

1. The Political And Historical Legacy of the MB Movement

This legacy has had its impact on Hamas's pan-Arab relations, where there are concerns as to the nature of Hamas's ties with the parent movement. Allowing Hamas to operate in certain Arab countries directly and publicly, may serve the platform of the Islamist movements in these countries, something that is inconsistent with the existing political situation. For this reason, it was not easy for these countries to fully open the door to Hamas, even if the latter declared that it would not intervene in their internal affairs.³³

Hamis tried to prove that it was not linked to the Islamist groups in these Arab countries, and ward off the suspicion of seeking to hurt the interests of existing regimes, which in turn considered Hamas an ideological movement inconsistent with their political structure. These regimes are influenced by their longstanding disputes with the MB movement, and need time to change their preconceptions. It was not easy for most Arab countries to feel relieved by Hamas's election victory, with the MB being Hamas's parent movement, which compelled Hamas to never stop for a moment in attempting to improve its situation.³⁴

A number of Arab countries, especially those surrounding Palestine, dealt with Hamas on the basis of their traditional hostility to the Islamists, and fear that the success of Hamas's model may affect their internal situation by strengthening the MB movement. That's why the rising popularity of Hamas and its win in the PLC elections was not welcomed by many Arab countries. However, the requirements

³² Bashir Nafi', The Mecca Agreement is an Indication of the Self-Abilities of Arab Policies, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 15/2/2007. (in Arabic)

³³ 'Ali al-Jarbawi, "Hamis, the Muslim Brotherhood's Gateway to Political Legitimacy," p. 72. (in Arabic)

³⁴ Bashir Nafi', *op. cit.*

of Arab action in the Palestinian arena pushed them to avoid open conflict with Hamas. For its part, Hamas sought to reassure Arab countries that it was interested only in the internal Palestinian arena, and that it would not be dragged into the discourse of Islamist movements in the Arab countries, something that was to Hamas's advantage in its pan-Arab dialogues. This was reflected in Egypt and KSA's mediation in Palestinian crises, to reach common ground.³⁵

2. Arab Recognition of the PLO Legitimacy

Hamas's discourse engendered indirect competition with the PLO, by refraining from explicitly recognizing it as the sole representative of the Palestinians. This hampered the expansion of Hamas's relations with Arab regimes because some of them believe that dealing with some of the factions, albeit with limited influence, is easier than dealing with Hamas, the influential group that competes with the PLO.

For years the PLO monopolized control over national struggle, entrenching the PLO in its Arab surrounding, while Palestinian Islamists were absent from political and military action. Hamas clashed with the parties who disapproved its proposal to consider it as an alternative to the PLO, or to recognize it as such.³⁶ However, Hamas, which fully understands this reality, never proposed itself as an alternative and focused on rebuilding the PLO and activating its institutions based on new foundations.

3. Projects of Peace Settlement

Starting with the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, followed by Oslo Accords in 1993, and the Treaty of Peace between The State of Israel and The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (aka Wadi 'Araba) in 1994, and then official and unofficial Arab-Israeli relations, and the spread of normalization, the Arab climate thus gradually moved away from the path and slogans of resistance. Although Hamas sought to revive and build its Arab relations on their bases, it found itself swimming against the tide, for everyone else was going towards a peaceful settlement.³⁷

³⁵ Muhammad al-Sa'id Idris, Hamas, the Arabs, and the Fifth Way, *Al-Khaleej*, 1/7/2007. (in Arabic)

³⁶ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarah al-Siyasiyyah*, p. 166.

³⁷ 'Ali al-Jarbawi, The Position of the Palestinian Islamic Movements on the Palestinian-Israeli Agreement, *Al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi* newspaper, Amman, February 1994, p. 53. (in Arabic)

Thus, commitment to the liberation of Palestine, and not recognizing the Israeli occupier, remained one of the biggest obstacles facing Hamas's pan-Arab relations. For there was a vast divergence in ideology and platform between Hamas, which rejected any negotiations or recognition of Israel whatsoever the justification or price is, and the Arab regimes engaged in the peace process, and which have made huge steps towards negotiations and recognizing Israel.³⁸

4. The Western Campaign Against Islamic Movements

The campaign accused them of terrorism, cracked down on them and persecuted them, while drying up the sources of their funding. Further adding to Hamas's suffering was the fact that this campaign intensified at the same time as Hamas was growing in strength and influence, with the eruption of the second *Intifadah* in 2000. The attacks of September 2001, and the serious consequences in the aftermath, with Hamas designated as a terror group, deterred many Arab countries from going far in the relationship with Hamas. Even a mere meeting with Hamas became a source of suspicion and perhaps even direct pressure, and the failure to condemn the armed operations carried out by Hamas in the occupied territories became a source of embarrassment vis-à-vis the West in general, and the US in particular.

5. Disentangling Hamas From Iran

With the increasing regional influence of Tehran, and the clamoring of Arab regimes over the "risks of the Shiite crescent," the region appeared to be divided between two axes. Hamas was classed as part of the Iranian-Syrian axis, bearing in mind that Hamas was aware that the challenges of the Palestinian interior required it to steer clear as far as possible from many regional entanglements that could turn its Arab backers against it, lose it their support, or at least, cause it to lose its neutral position.³⁹

As much as Iran bet on using Hamas to boost its regional influence, other Arab parties such as KSA and Egypt sought to disentangle Hamas from Iran, or curb the level of the latter's influence. This was something that Hamas was aware of, dealing with it with realism.⁴⁰

³⁸ Muhammad Jum'a, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

³⁹ 'Adnan Abu 'Amer, *Al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi Qita' Gazzah bayna al-Da'wah wa al-Siyasah*, p. 78.

⁴⁰ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

Having listed the five obstacles facing Hamas's pan-Arab relations, the following remarks have been noted:

- a. Hamas did not give enough detail about its notion of Arab relations, limiting itself to making references in its Charter in warning of the danger of the Zionist invasion, and calling on Arab countries surrounding Israel to open up their borders to the "*Mujahidin*." Even its electoral program for 2006 did not dedicate a broad space for pan-Arab relations, listing them under the theme of foreign policy and the international community.⁴¹
- b. Visits of Hamas leaders to Arab countries are scarce, whether at the official or popular level, and the same leaders conduct these visits.
- c. There was a failure to establish an organizational structure outside Palestine, and Hamas has only adopted a select number of political and media cadres to act as the equivalent of the basic operations existing inside the occupied territories. This has led to a lack of supply lines that provide the required cadres through the establishment of a normal popular base, and a limited scope to Hamas's administrative and political apparatus abroad. This was addressed later.

Actually, Hamas's commitment not to establish an organization outside Palestine (until 2011) was the subject of much debate. This basic principle was motivated by the need to avoid repeating the experience of the Palestinian factions that managed the affairs of the Palestinians in their host countries, but which soon clashed with the regimes, such as Jordan and Lebanon.⁴² However, the decision of the Guidance Bureau of the MB movement (in November 2011) approving the establishment of a special organization for the Palestinian Muslim Brothers, separate from the organization in the *Bilad al-Sham*, (under which both the Palestinian and Jordanian branches of the MB movement had been united), and merging the Gulf-based offices with the Palestinian MB movement, were a qualitative leap forward in the work of the Hamas movement abroad.

Although Hamas frames the Palestinian issue within an Arab and Islamic framework, to expand the struggle front, it has focused on the popular framework

⁴¹ Change and Reform Bloc, Electoral Program for the 2nd legislative elections of 2006.

⁴² When Hamas settled in Syria in early 2000, it established there organizational structures and activist bases that were nearly tantamount to a full organization comprising political, military, security, and media divisions, constituting a huge burden on Hamas, in terms of both security matters and finances.

and civil society institutions more than official institutions, after most regimes closed their doors in its face. However, Hamas sought to be more effective in building ties with official regimes after its election win, and forming the tenth Palestinian government in 2006, and after facing a series of challenges particularly with the European-American threat to suspend aid and funding to its government in April/ May 2006. The attitudes of those capitals over the election results varied from welcome and support, to reservation, and outright wagering on Hamas's failure. Despite the fact that some countries received Hamas's leaders and responded by providing financial support, they could not (or did not want to) grant the kind of Arab legitimacy to Hamas that backed its positions.

Fifth: The Popular Dimension in Hamas's Pan-Arab Relations

Due to the evolution of Hamas's work experience, and accurate interpretation of reality, its interest in the Arab public, represented by grassroots organizations and political forces, especially Islamic movements, evolved. Indeed, Hamas's perception of this level is different from that of the official level, where its Charter spoke about national and religious groups and Arab associations, urging them to support Hamas and act as a strategic dimension for it at all levels; human, material and media-related.⁴³

The official level has its own set of necessities that Hamas understands and from where it seeks the best available backing for the Palestinian issue, while engaging the regimes to expand this support. The links with the popular level remained open and Hamas sought to develop and be open with them, focusing the majority of its outreach work on it, because certain policies and pressures govern Arab regimes.⁴⁴

Therefore, Hamas drafted a number of general policies regarding its political relations with popular Arab parties, which can be identified as following:

1. Establishing relations with various popular segments, and making sure to win their support and sympathy, without ignoring or neglecting any of them, while accommodating priorities accordance to importance. Furthermore, Hamas is

⁴³ *Charter of Hamas.*

⁴⁴ Anwar 'Abdul-Hadi Abu Taha, Faisal Darraj, and Jamal Barout, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

- keen to mobilize these segments' support for the cause and win their support and sympathy, and enlist their capabilities, each according to its abilities and position.
2. Strengthening its relations with various popular parties, regardless of their ideological or political affiliations, based on the premise that Palestine is a cause that concerns the entire nation, and everyone has the right to contribute in its battle, while giving precedence to Islamist movements and popular associations with an Islamic background.
 3. Avoiding entering into ethnic, regional, and sectarian divisions in the Arab nation, and steering clear of differences related to Islamic jurisprudence in sensitive matters, in contrast to clarity when it comes to its ideological affiliation.
 4. Adopting the just causes of the Arab peoples and movements, standing with righteousness against evil, justice against oppression, and showing solidarity with human principles and human rights. In the event of strong embarrassment and incapacity, Hamas would remain silent, but has never adopted a position that contradicted its principles.⁴⁵
 5. Calling for unity, accord, cooperation, and coordination among various Arab forces and popular associations, and encouraging rapprochement and unity over doing good and reconciliation, while snubbing all forms of division and infighting.⁴⁶
 6. Patience and continuous follow up in mobilizing popular associations and groups, and soliciting the required level of support. Hamas avoided severing ties with them, or overlooking them, because time and persistent efforts were considered necessary to mobilize the energies of the nation to confront the Israeli threat.
 7. Focusing on key leaders, such as senior scholars, intellectuals, journalists, and media figures, because this achieves quicker and bigger gains for Hamas.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ One can talk in detail about Hamas's position on the Arab Spring and its silence regarding them, despite its full support of peoples, and what this cost Hamas in terms of criticism by the regimes, but Hamas realized that stating a clear and explicit position might have a bigger cost.

⁴⁶ 'Abdul Sattar Qassim, Hamas and Orbiting the Arab Regimes, OnIslam, 18/3/2007, <http://ww2.onislam.net/arabic/newsanalysis/analysis-opinions/palestine/89083-2007-03-18%2016-57-23.html> (in Arabic)

⁴⁷ 'Abdul Ilah Belkiz, Weakness in the Relations Between the Palestinian Decision With Moving Forward in the Arab Situation, *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, Beirut, 30/10/2006, <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/161160> (in Arabic)

The above is indicative of a high dose of political realism and an intricate engagement in a complex Arab situation, where the popular dimension is one of the most major yet sensitive issues. This was clear from the participation of Hamas's senior figures in popular conferences, meetings, and rallies as key speakers. Hamas also relied on national associations in every country, albeit their functions and celebrations different between one country and another, according to their specific circumstances and internal conditions, while Arab popular support for it differed between one association and another.⁴⁸

Hamas's reliance primarily on the interaction of Islamist movements and popular groups in the Arab countries helped it avoid collision with government policies in those countries. However, it deprived it of the benefits of direct contact and building lasting relationships, especially since many solidarity activities were organized under general slogans such as supporting the resistance of the Palestinian people.⁴⁹

It could be argued that the general reading of Hamas's policies in dealing at the grassroots level, confirms that it has succeeded to a large extent in dealing with the complex situation in the Arab world and its popular environments. Hamas was keen on issuing statements on various Arab events at the grassroots level, and developing active contacts to strengthen its popular relations, given what it can provide in terms of cover and legitimacy. This is while bearing in mind that Hamas's track record in relation to its ties to Arab political parties and movements is rife with messages of support, solidarity, and blessing, especially during fateful events, giving it a fertile ground to strengthen its grassroots Arab relations.⁵⁰

Sixth: The Arab Stances Towards Hamas

The change of positions in Arab policymaking imposed on Hamas and Arab regimes the need to reassess a number of issues. Therefore, it was natural for their relations to develop, exchanging points of view face to face, or having a mutual partial acceptance, at least temporarily.

⁴⁸ *Al-Quds* magazine, Arab Media Center, Cairo, April 2004, p. 16. (in Arabic)

⁴⁹ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarasah al-Siyasiyyah*, p. 194.

⁵⁰ Hamas issued many statements directed at the popular Arab level, including: A statement against the sanctions on Libya in 1992, and another in the same year expressing condolences to the Egyptian people following the earthquake that struck Egypt, and many other statements on myriad issues and crises that the Iraqi people was subjected to in 2006.

While Hamas's Arab relations are concerned with four main countries: KSA, Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, the leaders of the movement in GS favor the relationship with Egypt by virtue of geography, history, and social bonds. Hamas leaders in the WB prefer to open up to Jordan for the same reasons. Therefore, it is not surprising that Egypt and Jordan, alongside KSA and Syria, are the linchpins of Arab reality for Hamas.⁵¹

It is worth noting that the Maghreb countries have not received from Hamas the necessary attention and serious keenness to establish relationships and conversely it did not receive from these countries an initiative to establish such relations. Hamas leaders, representatives, and ministers did not visit their capitals as frequently as other Arab capitals, although Hamas has increasingly reached out to Tunisia after its revolution in 2011.

This can be explained by two factors:

1. Hamas, in its pan-Arab relations, focused on the countries surrounding Palestine, as these directly impacted and were impacted by the events and developments of the Palestinian issue, such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.
2. It had been the policy of Maghreb countries to crackdown on and prevent any role by Islamists. In addition, Hamas's experience with these countries is not encouraging, and can be considered a failure, such as with Tunisia and Algeria.

Subsequently, Hamas did not find it necessary to appoint representatives and spokespeople in those countries, also because the latter had strong relations to the PLO. It seems that Hamas did not want to compete with the latter and kept its distance with Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Mauritania. At the same time, it is worth bearing in mind that the grassroots level in these countries deserves attention from the movement, especially in light of the activities there supporting the Palestinians in general, and Hamas in particular. Furthermore, Maghreb governments, at the official level, have a long record of positions in support of the Palestinian issue.

To elaborate further, it is necessary to look at the most important axes of Hamas's pan-Arab relations with the following countries:

⁵¹ 'Adnan Melhem, Hamas: A Reading of Its Organizational, Ideological, and Political Instruments, *Al-Ayyam*, 21/2/2006. (in Arabic)

1. Relations with Egypt

This is the most important and largest Arab state that has a political, military, and demographic weight, with a long record in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is politically obvious for Hamas to pursue ties with Egypt, owing to their inescapable bonds of Arabism, Islam, language, history, and geography. Regardless of any disputes between Egypt and Hamas, Egypt can never sever ties completely with Hamas, because this would mean losing its “paternal” role, and its ability to influence the Palestinian situation.⁵² While Hamas is aware that Egypt is not just a name, a number, or a geographical expanse, and is nothing fleeting, and a national necessity for the Palestinians, relations between the two sides have regularly been “lukewarm.” In truth, this is not a special case in the history of their relationship, as relations between them have been lackluster in most cases, and always accompanied by mutual suspicion. Relations between Hamas and Egypt have thus always vacillated.

Egypt realized that its national security extends to GS, where a “mysterious”—in the Egyptian view—Islamist project is growing, and that getting there necessitates a direct relationship with Hamas, even when disputes with it reach a dramatic level. Conversely, the deputy head of Hamas’s political bureau Musa Abu Marzuq confirmed that relations with Egypt are not governed by temporary current circumstances, because they are much bigger than that.⁵³

For this reason, Hamas’s positions in dealing with Egypt have been flexible and dynamic. It was keen on maintaining smooth ties with Egypt, even during the worst circumstances during the Israeli war on GS. It sought to take advantage of common ground with Egypt to reassure the latter, while being responsible towards Palestinian and Egyptian interests. Meanwhile, Cairo sought to systematically and cautiously keep Hamas in check, by maintaining a margin of relationship that allowed Egypt to influence the Palestinian groups, developing into a form of assimilation and “taming.” For this reason, Egypt sought to maintain good ties with Hamas.⁵⁴

⁵² Hasan Naf’ah, Egypt and Hamas... and the Need for a New Formulation of the Bases of the Relationship, *Al-Hayat*, 27/12/2006. (in Arabic)

⁵³ ‘Ali Badawan, Egypt, Hamas, and the Problems in Their Relations, *Aljazeera.net*, 6/11/2009, <http://bit.ly/2nCILrs> (in Arabic)

⁵⁴ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, Egypt and Hamas... the Nature of the Relationship and Its Progression, *Aljazeera.net*, 15/1/2009, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/B4CB7A98-CB61-44C3-A2AE-465AEC8EAC13.htm> (in Arabic)

As Hamas continued to impose political facts on the ground in the 1967 occupied territories, especially after *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, this had a positive reflection in Cairo, giving Hamas a prestigious position that it had not enjoyed before, with Hamas's delegates receiving repeated invitations for talks in Egypt. This is a position that even major Islamic groups like the MB movement did not attain (until 2011).⁵⁵

Egypt's relation with Hamas was based on a variety of factors, including:

- a. Perceiving the Palestinian issue from the standpoint of Egypt's regional and pan-Arab role.
- b. Commitment to the peace process with Israel, which further tips the balance of power in Israel's favor.
- c. Discomfort for dealing with an MB-affiliated group, yet being compelled to do so given Hamas's popularity and performance.
- d. Awareness of Israel's desire to dump the burden of managing the GS on Egypt's shoulders, and the threat this poses on the future Palestinian state.
- e. No matter how sharp the dispute between Hamas and Egypt might be, the latter's massive human and material resources keeps Egypt an asset for the Palestinian issue, and an acceptable and indispensable umbrella for the oversight of internal Palestinian relations.⁵⁶

The previous factors continued to govern the relationship with Egypt until the eruption of the revolution of 25 January 2011. Egypt then entered a phase of changes and fluctuations, whose repercussions continue to interact by the time of writing. The period that followed the ouster of the regime of Hosni Mubarak, during which the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took power, witnessed a relative improvement in relations between the regime and Hamas, resulting from the climate of the revolution that was supportive of Palestinian rights and resistance, and hostile to Israel. Furthermore, the subsequent victory of the Islamists (specifically the MB movement) in the legislative and presidential elections gave impetus to the relationship with Hamas. The period during which

⁵⁵ Mohammad Yaghi and David Schenker, Hamas-Egyptian Relations Deteriorate, site of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2/1/2009, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hamas-egyptian-relations-deteriorate>

⁵⁶ Information Department, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, *Misr wa Hamas* (Egypt and Hamas), Information Report (7) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2009), p. 45.

Muhammad Morsi was president, between 30/6/2012 until a military coup toppled him on 3/7/2013, saw a marked improvement in official relations with Hamas. In addition, Egypt began receiving Hamas leaders, and holding broad-based grassroots events supporting resistance and the Palestinian issue in coordination with Hamas and affiliated activists.

The Egyptian presidency faced real difficulties in implementing its programs on the ground. It encountered a wave of obstruction because of the non-cooperation of the “Deep State” holding on to the institutions of the government, and the judiciary’s obstruction of the legislative institution... However, the presidency and the government supported GS and the Hamas government during the Israeli aggression in November 2012, and adopted Hamas’s demands to end the aggression and the blockade. The Egyptian prime minister visited GS during the war, while the Egyptian government organized a visit of a number of foreign ministers to GS. Restrictions at the Rafah Crossing were reduced from the Egyptian side, and Hamas convened its central council, electing new leaders, in the Spring of 2013 with the consent of the Egyptian leadership.

However, the military coup sought to rearrange the situation in Egypt in a way that uproots or marginalizes “political Islam” and decimate the MB movement, which was designated as a terror group. Subsequently, Egypt’s government adopted a hostile position towards Hamas, closing its doors in its face. It tightened the GS blockade and destroyed tunnels leading to it. The Egyptian judiciary issued a politicized ruling, banning Hamas’s activities in Egypt and confiscating its assets. Hamas, especially after the coup, came under fierce attacks in the media, rife with unsubstantiated allegations. Nevertheless, because of their frequency and intensity, without Hamas being given the chance to respond, the media campaign painted a dark and distorted image of Hamas among ordinary Egyptians.

Nevertheless, stability in Egypt will encourage more moderate policies towards Hamas, if the Egyptian regime wants to restore its central role in the Palestinian issue, and deal reasonably with the main parties in the Palestinian political equation, of which Hamas is a key component.

2. Relations with Syria

Several factors played a key role in the development and continuation of the relationship between the two parties, including:

- a. The existence of common denominators between them, such as non-recognition of Israel.
- b. Accord over the resistance as a strategic choice, and the right of the Palestinian people to resist occupation, while refusing to designate this as “terrorism.”
- c. Syria refused to participate in the Sharm el-Sheikh conference, held in March 1996, attended by more than 30 countries, and which launched an international campaign against the Palestinian resistance.

In 1995, Damascus received Musa Abu Marzuq, the head of Hamas’s political bureau at the time, and Engineer ‘Imad al-‘Alami, member of the political bureau, after their expulsion from Jordan. Damascus did this again in 1999, when it received four Hamas leaders, led by Khalid Mish‘al, head of the political bureau, after being deported by the Jordanian authorities. Hamas’s conduct helped smooth relations with Syria, as it adopted a transparent and straightforward attitude, and refrained from interfering in Syria’s internal affairs or attack Damascus when it held direct talks with Israel. Nevertheless, Hamas has clearly expressed its position opposed to the negotiations, and perhaps something that has helped strengthen relations between Syria and Hamas is that the former did not put pressure on the latter to recognize Israel.⁵⁷

In late 2005, Khalid Mish‘al expressed the relationship with Syria by saying that the latter has powerful allies. For it became clear that the real motive of US policy towards Syria was to punish it for its nationalistic positions opposed to US and Zionist policies in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, and subdue it into subscribing to US policies, plans, and priorities in the region. Mish‘al pointed out that the resistance forces in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, stood alongside Syria, in the trench of resistance, steadfastness, and defiance. He added that Syria was not alone in the battle, they are all with Syria, and they will not allow anyone to singe out and attack Syria or any of the parties of the extended front of resistance and defiance.⁵⁸

Hamas overcame a number of pitfalls in its relationship with Syria, most notably the fact that it is an Islamic group affiliated to the MB movement, which

⁵⁷ Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (Washington: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 136.

⁵⁸ Radwan al-Sayyid, Hamas, the Arabs, and the Future, *Almustaqbal* newspaper, Beirut, 3/2/2006. (in Arabic)

fought a bloody conflict with the Syrian regime in the early 1980s. Then, the manifestations of its growing alliance with Damascus began taking various forms, including:

- a. Syria became the semi-permanent headquarters of Hamas's leadership, after it was expelled from Jordan.
- b. It welcomed the victory of Hamas in the legislative elections, with President Bashar al-Assad saying that the victory would ease the pressure on Syria.
- c. It received a number of officials and ministers from the Hamas government in the GS, most notably Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah, and Interior and Foreign Ministers Sa'id Siyam and Mahmud al-Zahhar.
- d. Syria promised to provide financial and logistical support to the Palestinian government, raise the level of diplomatic representation, and grant entry to holders of PA passports into its territory, while admitting 400 Palestinians who were stranded on the Syrian-Iraqi border.⁵⁹

Observers have split the characterization of the Hamas-Syria relationship as follows:

- a. Calling it a relationship of subordination and dependence. But Hamas is convinced that these accusations are based on illogical arguments and false premises. They are intended to claim that Hamas is subservient to external parties to discredit its patriotism by claiming that Hamas is a proxy of the Syrian regime. This prompted its former representative in Damascus 'Imad al-'Alami to say, "Hamas's vision is clear. The international attitudes hostile to Hamas are not on account of its relations with Syria, but rather its refusal to recognize Israel, its rejection of the agreements signed with it, and its adherence to the path of jihad and obstruction of the Oslo Accords and the Roadmap."
- b. Placing both Hamas and Syria in the same box as one strategic political alliance. Indeed, while Hamas found in Syria a geographical political incubator when other capitals closed their doors, Syria benefited from a close relationship with Hamas, for demonstrating that it is concerned with the Palestinian issue from pan-Arab and national perspectives. Thus, reaping many popular, Arab, and Islamic gains. In the context of its conflict with Israel, Syria benefited from

⁵⁹ Raafat Murrah, Hamas and Iran and Syria.. Interests in Tense Climates, in Turki al-Dakhil et al., *Harakat Hamas* (Hamas Movement), Book Series 20 (Dubai: Al-Misbar Center for Studies and Research, 2008).

supporting Hamas by improving its political position against Israeli greed and threats, in a way that befitted its geopolitical and historical position.⁶⁰

- c. A strategic relationship based on objectivity, mutual interests, and equilibrium based on common denominators.

As proof of the latter characterization, there have been substantial differences in the positions of Hamas and Syria, including:

- a. Hamas opposed the Syrian approach, which sees peace with Israel as a strategic choice, and which accepts recognition of Israel up to signing a peace agreement with it. It also accepts a final Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, as part of the official Arab vision of the conflict. But Hamas's vision is based on ending the conflict after Palestine is liberated, from the River to the Sea.
- b. Hamas to this date has not recognized the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Arab Summit in Beirut in March/ April 2002. This is contrary to the Syrian view, which adopted the Arab position, up until the Annapolis meeting in the US in 2007.
- c. The views of Hamas and Syria over the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 diverged. Syria took part alongside the US and Western powers in the same alliance, when the US fleets came to strike the Iraqi army. Even though Hamas opposed the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, its position stemmed from its care for the nation's strengths and to prevent internal Arab differences.
- d. The two sides had different positions over the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Hamas saw that the US invasion weakened the nation and targeted the entire region, while the Syrians focused on removing the threat represented by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Damascus's historic enemy in the region.⁶¹

This prompted Israeli researcher Anat Kurz to say that Hamas is first and foremost a national Palestinian movement, and any excessive rapprochement with Syria could cause it to lose its solid position in the Palestinian arena. For his part,

⁶⁰ Salman Salman, The Confused Relationship Between Hamas and Syria, site of the Green Corner, 9/9/2011, http://www.grenc.com/show_article_main.cfm?id=23837 (in Arabic)

⁶¹ Shakir al-Jawhari, What's Behind the Developments in the Ties Between Damascus and Washington?, site of Al-Safsaf, 17/9/2006, <http://www.safsaf.org/01-09-06news/articels+news/shakerjuhari.htm> (in Arabic)

former Israeli intelligence operative Amos Gilboa questioned claims about Hamas's subservience to Syria, saying that Hamas had maintained its independence, and that its program had completely contradicted that of Syria.⁶²

On the other hand, Syria has had to pay exorbitant prices for its relationship with Hamas, as follows:

- a. After the outbreak of the second *Intifadah* in September 2000, there was a dramatic increase in "self-immolation"⁶³ operations carried out by the Palestinian resistance forces within the 1948 Palestinian territories, which were led by Hamas. Israel stepped up its threats against Syria, holding it responsible for harboring the leaders of Palestinian organizations. It claimed that the orders to carry out resistance operations came from Damascus.
- b. In a clear bid to put pressure on Syria, Israel carried out airstrikes there, in response to its support and protection of Hamas. Israel also assassinated 'Ezzedeen al-Sheikh Khalil, one of Hamas's key military officials, in Syria.
- c. American and European threats and pressure on Syria increased. In May 2003, then-US Secretary of State Collin Powell visited Damascus to demand the closure of Hamas's offices there.
- d. Demands amounting to more than an international resolution were issued to boycott Syria over several issues, including supporting Hamas. Then US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice criticized Syria, saying that Syria was not just a problem for Iraq, but also for Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. She stepped up her belligerent rhetoric against Damascus, calling it to end its support for Islamic militants who want to destroy the peace process in the Middle East, as she claimed, if Syria wanted to avoid becoming isolated.⁶⁴

The tension in the relationship between Hamas and Syria, on the one hand, and the US, on the other, increased, as the Israeli threats to wage a new war in the region escalated, and the siege and isolation imposed on Hamas and Syria

⁶² *Haaretz*, 22/12/2009.

⁶³ The overwhelming majority of Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims consider these operations to be "martyrdom operations" while most Israelis and western writers and media describe them as "suicide operations." We used the word "self-immolation" in this report to be as neutral as possible. However, such terms may need more discussion.

⁶⁴ Jamil al-Nemri, A Humanitarian Initiative Opens a Political Window... Why Not?, *Alghad*, 25/7/2011. (in Arabic)

were tightened. Thus, both sides found that their interests still lie in mutual understanding, cooperation and coordination, with the lack of any sign of change in Western attitudes towards Syria.⁶⁵

The uprising in Syria in March 2011 disrupted relations between Hamas and the Syrian regime. Hamas is a popular movement that expresses what the Arab and Muslim person aspires to, whether freedom, integrity or liberty. At the same time, no one can deny what the Syrian state had offered the Palestinian resistance in general, and Hamas in particular in the form of logistic and political protection. Syria had represented the resistance forces' position, especially during the war on GS. But, despite that, Hamas considered that the depth of its relationship with Syrian regime must not undermine the strength of its relationship with the Syrian people, who were a great example of nationalism and defense of the Palestinian issue, and who supported resistance to liberate the Arab land. Hamas is still convinced that whether the Assad regime survives or overthrown, the Palestinian issue will remain in the Syrian conscience.

For this reason, Hamas dealt with extreme caution with the Syrian issue, and was keen to have a balanced attitude towards it. In general, Hamas's position was in short that while it appreciated for the Syrian regime its reception and support of the resistance line, Hamas also supports the right of the Syrian people to express their free will, and establish the political system that truly represents their aspirations. Hamas also condemned the security crackdown and massacres against the Syrian people, while rejecting foreign intervention. In the first few months of the revolution, Hamas leaders made concerted efforts to mediate towards resolving the crisis, away from foreign intervention and military and security approaches. However, the regime insisted on pressing ahead with the security crackdown against the opposition. Hamas refused for the regime to exploit its presence to suggest it was under its wing or that it backed its actions. For this reason, Hamas began a gradual exit from Syria without antagonizing the regime, a few months after the revolution began in Syria. Hamas's exit was completed nearly with the exit of Khalid Mish'al from Damascus in January 2012.

⁶⁵ Hamas's Relationship with Syria, Why?, site of Shabakat Filastin li al-Hiwar (The Palestine Dialogue Forum), 3/2/2003, <http://www.paldf.net/forum/showthread.php?t=7423> (in Arabic)

Practically speaking, Hamas's links to the Syrian regime were cut since that time, and Hamas faced the ire of the Syrian regime, Iran, and Hizbullah as a result. There were also accusations that Hamas fighters were taking part in the Syrian revolution against the regime. However, Hamas has always maintained its non-interference in Syria's internal affairs, and that any Hamas affiliated fighters were there individually and not under orders from the movement.

Hamis opted to pay a heavy price for leaving Syria, for the sake of preserving its principles and convictions that peoples have the right to attain their freedoms and build the political system that represents them. Hamas lost its logistical base and headquarters. Its leaders became scattered in Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey, and it lost most of Iran's support. It paid the price of its attitudes before it received any fruits from the "Arab Spring," which reinforces the credibility of Hamas and its genuine belonging to its nation and the aspiration of its peoples.

3. Relations with Jordan⁶⁶

Jordan is one of the most vulnerable Arab countries to the twists and turns of the Palestinian issue, and to Israeli pressure and American pressure, especially after the distance between the Jordanian perspective and the American vision narrowed. However, Jordan's policies towards Hamas in most cases reflected the balance of power in the Arab region. When Jordan found that Egypt, KSA, and Syria cohesively faced US pressure, it was difficult for it to pursue a different policy alone. Furthermore, the Islamic movement in Jordan, represented by the MB movement, played a prominent role in protecting Hamas and its political positions, before the historical decision to expel Hamas from the country.⁶⁷

The most significant historical development in the relations between the two, is what happened with Khalid Mish'al in 1997, when Israel tried to poison him in revenge for his involvement in activities hostile to Israel. Jordan under King Hussein threatened to cut ties with Israel, forcing the latter to provide the

⁶⁶ Perhaps the book "*Kill Khalid*," by Canadian journalist Paul McGeough, provided the best diagnosis of the relationship between Hamas and Jordan, especially when he tackled the attempt to assassinate Khalid Mish'al in Amman, see *Uqtul Khalid: 'Amaliyyat al-Musad al-Fashilah li Ightiyal Khalid Mish'al wa Su'ud Hamas* (Kill Khalid: The Failed Mossad Assassination of Khalid Mishal and the Rise of Hamas) (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc., 2009), pp. 181–199.

⁶⁷ Muhammad Khalid al-Az'ar, Hamas and the Arabs... A Relationship on the Edge of a Sword, *Al Bayan*, 30/6/2007. (in Arabic)

antidote to save his life. Israel also released Hamas's leader Sheikh Ahmad Yasin in exchange for the release of the two Mossad agents who tried to poison Mish'al, and were returned to Israel.⁶⁸

Without delving deep into the details of historical developments, and the states of tension and semi-estrangement that has surrounded the relationship between the two sides, Hamas was not the only one benefiting from the previous dynamic in the relationship with the Jordanian government, because the latter also benefited. Therefore, it was not in its interests to squander all that it had gained from its relationship with Hamas.⁶⁹

At the same time, there are a number of obstacles that could hinder the restoration of the Hamas-Jordan relationship to its previous state, including:

- a. Jordan's sponsorship of the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis, at the behest of the US, with a view to giving Jordan a regional role as post-Mubarak Egypt finds itself preoccupied with putting its house in order, despite its success in brokering the prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas.
- b. The attempt to contain Hamas according to the new regional post-Arab Spring era, specifically the post-Syrian regime phase, and in light of US and regional wagers that by losing the alliance with Damascus, Hamas might be forced to engage in the peace process.
- c. Warm relations between Jordan and the PA, show the depth of Amman's involvement in rearranging the Palestinian arena, using Hamas as a bargaining chip in its battle against the Israeli proposal regarding Jordan as an alternative homeland for the Palestinians, and countering the Islamist rise at home. All these calculations pushed Jordan to seek to open a new chapter with Hamas, dealing with it in the logic of calculations and interests.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ahmad Mansur, *Sheikh Ahmad Yasin: Shahid 'ala 'Asr al-Intifadah* (Sheikh Ahmad Yasin: A Witness to the Age of Intifadah) (Cairo: Modern Egyptian Bureau, 2004). The book's episodes were broadcasted on Al Jazeera Channel in April and May 1999. The eight episodes are available on <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/3FFE7011-6735-40DB-968A-8F8F2B78C4BE> (in Arabic)

⁶⁹ Khalid Thouwaib, *The Relationship Between Hamas and Jordan 1987–2007*, p. 142. (in Arabic)

⁷⁰ 'Umar Kayid, *Hamas and Jordan.. Calculations and Interests*, site of Elaph.com, 15/1/2012, <http://www.elaph.com/Web/opinion/2012/1/709371.html> (in Arabic)

Jordanian and Palestinian voices arguing for the need to restore relations between Jordan and Hamas on a strategic basis imposed by mutual interests, never stopped. These were in light of pressing developments, most notably:

- a. The developments of the Arab Spring.
- b. Strong and influential Turkish presence in the region.
- c. The failure of the peace process, and persistent Israeli intransigence.⁷¹
- d. The emergence of a significant change in the regional balance of power and influence in the Middle East, and the effects of global economic conditions.
- e. The presence of Hamas as a political force with considerable popular presence in the WB and GS, and what it was able to establish on the ground as a governing body in the GS since 2007.
- f. The growing crisis in the ranks of the Fatah movement, its decline, and the weakness of its influence in GS.⁷²

What makes the relationship between Jordan and Hamas even more important is their inability to develop strategies alone for dealing with the Palestinian issue, away from the other party and without consensus on common denominators. For this reason, it is not in the interest of Jordan to marginalize or be hostile to Hamas given the amount of common ground they share.

Therefore, maintaining the state of estrangement between the two that has been ongoing since 1999 would be harmful to Jordan's interests, and the Palestinian issue as well. It must be noted here that the nature of Hamas's political program, and its vision of the conflict with Israel fulfill Jordan's interests. It rejects the alternative homeland and the transfer of Palestinians into its territory, and any other solution that would take place at the expense of its strategic interests, and

⁷¹ Since the issuance of the Charter in 1988 and until the moment of writing, Hamas's position did not differ much in the rejection of peaceful solutions despite multiple demands by various parties for Hamas to accept it. With regard to negotiations with Israel, Hamas still rejects it, albeit its position shifted from one based on principle, religious considerations, and ideology, to one that focuses on political infeasibility. Thabet al-'Ammour, *Mustaqbal al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah fi Filastin.. Hamas Namudhajan* (The Future of the Islamic Resistance in Palestine... The Hamas Model) (Cairo: Arab Media Center, 2009), p. 220.

⁷² Rami Melhem, Towards a Strategic Relationship Between Jordan and Hamas... an exploratory study, *Alarab Alyawm* newspaper, Amman, 30/10/2011. (in Arabic)

would pose a threat to its future, stability and order. Restoring the relationship would also serve Jordan's political and security goals.⁷³

On the other hand, Hamas has great popularity among Jordanians, and the regime ought to be interested in understanding and keeping up with popular attitudes in the country, especially as Hamas was never at odds with Jordan, or interfered with its internal affairs, albeit there are some reservations, though they can be overcome.

The future relationship between Jordan and Hamas could follow one of the following scenarios:

a. Developing a Strategic Relationship: In a way that achieves and furthers their mutual strategic interests. There are several factors that this scenario relies upon, most notably:

- Hamas's ability to maintain the stability of Palestinians in Jordan, and maintain its representative position among them.
- Achieving breakthroughs in its international and pan-Arab relations in favor of its program, and changing Jordan's old negative perception of Hamas.
- The possibility of mutual openness, the seriousness of dialogue to make progress for stable relations, overlooking minor mistakes, and prioritizing the most important interests.⁷⁴

b. Reaching Interim Understandings: which constitutes a low ceiling for the size, nature, and style of relationship between them, within current dynamics and political developments, in light of intersections in political vision, and especially with regard to the issues of an alternative homeland and the right of return.

c. Communication Over Interests: The minimum reasonable level of the relationship between the two should be engaging in dialogue and consultation on issues of mutual interests.

d. Steering Clear of Differences: based on respect between two parties having joint interests. At the very least, this would maintain a relationship that respects the other, and understand its decisions, avoiding friction and confrontation, or to

⁷³ Milestones in the History of the Relation Between Hamas and Jordan, Aljazeera.net, 14/6/2001, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/archive/archive?ArchiveId=10346> (in Arabic)

⁷⁴ Muhannad Mabideen, Dialogue with Hamas and the Urgency of Change, *Alghad*, 25/7/2011. (in Arabic)

entering into axes or establishing relations that harm the interests of the other. It may show bias in favor of a rival party for one of the two sides, such as with Jordan supporting Fatah, the PA, and the PLO.

e. Failure and Hostility: This would be one of the most dangerous directions to pursue, because it would fail to emphasize shared interests, and could encourage parties to go towards the worst option, namely, enmity and rivalry. This would be the same recipe for the relationship that has continued for a length of time, where the above was the main characteristic of their relationship. This is despite the Jordanian conviction that it is not conducive to Amman's interests, reputation, and internal stability to go too far in boycotting a national liberation movement like Hamas, given the respect and popular support it has among Arab and Islamic parties, and the Jordanian and Palestinian peoples.⁷⁵

Hamas-Jordan relations have witnessed positive development, particularly since the Arab change and uprisings in 2011. Jordanian Prime Minister 'Awni al-Khasawneh admitted that alienating Hamas was a "political and constitutional mistake," and that Jordan's relation with all Palestinian factions must be normal, whether with the PA or Hamas.⁷⁶ A Hamas delegation headed by Khalid Mish'al formally visited Jordan and met with the King on 29/1/2012, which ended a 12-year official political boycott. Yet, this openness remained limited and was slow and cold. It became colder still after the military coup in Egypt, the attempts to marginalize "political Islam" in the region, and the diminishing force of the popular Jordanian protest movement. Thus, the year 2014 came without Hamas having any declared activity in Jordan.

4. Relations with Lebanon

In the 1970s and 1980s, Lebanon was the site of a fierce civil war between various Lebanese sects, in which the Palestinians became entangled for a variety of reasons. This forced Hamas to be cautious in its Lebanese relations, and mindful of not being drawn into internal Lebanese crises, which tend to be open-ended.

⁷⁵ Muhammad Abu Rumman, *The Crisis Between Jordan and Hamas: Its Dimensions and Consequences*, Aljazeera.net, 25/4/2006, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/00548C78-FD89-42C7-9C4D-A0356F3401E6.htm> (in Arabic)

⁷⁶ *Assabeel*, 1 and 3/11/2011.

Hamas maintained an official presence in Lebanon early on, with the end of the 1980s, specifically in 1989, when Israel expelled a number of its leaders to south Lebanon. There, they intermingled with the Palestinians living in Lebanon, forging strong relationships with the various Palestinian and Lebanese factions.

Israel soon deported more than 400 of the movement’s leaders in mid-December 1992. While the bulk of them returned later to WB and GS, a number of them remained in Lebanon, and began to establish an infrastructure for the movement, attracting Palestinians in Lebanon. Hamas managed to establish relations that can be said to be, at the very least, “satisfactory,” with Lebanese factions of various ideological, political, and sectarian affiliations. Its meetings with the representatives of the Lebanese government and political forces focused on the following important issues:

- a. Safeguarding the right of return for Palestine refugees in Lebanon.
- b. Safeguarding peace, security, and stability in Lebanon.
- c. The future of Palestinian weapons through Palestinian-Lebanese accord, as part of a comprehensive political framework.⁷⁷

In Lebanon, where internal conflict regularly deteriorates dramatically, because of sectarian differences and sensitivities, Hamas managed to stay at the same distance with all sides, yet made it clear that it was on the side of the resistance to confront US-Israeli plan in the region. Hamas kept the lines of communication open with both the opposition and the government, and contributed to fortifying the internal arena against Lebanese-Palestinian conflict that could pose a real threat to civil peace in the country.⁷⁸

Hamas in Lebanon also made a serious and responsible step in conveying the demands of the Palestinian refugees there and their suffering to the Lebanese government. It was committed to make the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) succeed, in order to advance relations between the two peoples and support the rights of the refugees, up to enacting laws that allow the latter to work and own property. Hamas also sought to remind the Lebanese government of its responsibility to Nahr al-Bared Refugee Camp, and of providing the necessary

⁷⁷ Interview with Usamah Hamdan, PIC, 8/10/2010,

<http://www.palestine-info.info/arabic/hamas/hewar/2005/7amdan05.htm> (in Arabic)

⁷⁸ *Al-Hayat*, 26/10/2006.

funds for its reconstruction, as well as removing the militarized buffer zone around it. Hamas also asked the Lebanese government to recognize official PA documents, to facilitate for Palestinian refugees the registration of births and deaths, as well as residence papers for their spouses or children born in the PA areas.⁷⁹

Seventh: Hamas and the Arab Spring

Hamas watched the popular uprisings in late 2010 and early 2011 closely. Hamas sensed that it would definitely be affected by these uprisings, because the rivalry that marked its relations with most Arab regimes did not apply to populations and it had maintained its position among them.

Hamas was affected by the Arab Spring through the so-called “power of the model,” with Islamists winning landslide victories, especially in the elections of Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. This bolstered Hamas, and gave it an opportunity to benefit from the success of the Islamists in the Arab region, since their victory created a good climate for the launching of a comprehensive and contiguous Islamist project of which the GS could be part. This could be a project in the Arab region that would be sufficient to defeat Israel.⁸⁰

Some political figures in Hamas even felt relieved after the Arab uprisings and the transformations in the region, most notably the ouster of the previous Egyptian regime that was hostile to the Palestinian group, worked constantly to undermine its rule, and tried to crush Hamas in collaboration with Israel and the PA.

The ousted Egyptian regime had a key role in the siege of GS, and in the aggression on it in 2008/2009. This regime thus became the equivalent of a heavy boulder obstructing Hamas’s path and undercutting its achievements, and posing a real threat to its existence. So when this regime was removed, Hamas felt more flexibility and mobility was now possible.

Regarding the change in Tunisia, Hamas felt this was in its interest, because Tunisia under Zein al-‘Abideen Bin ‘Ali had all but banned Islamists, and dealt with Hamas with apathy as though it did not exist. Bin ‘Ali’s regime was the one

⁷⁹ *Al-‘Awda* magazine, Beirut, January 2012, p. 24.

⁸⁰ Mohammad Hijazi, Hamas and the Arab Spring, and the Bases of Political Partnership, *Assafir*, 18/2/2012. (in Arabic)

to neglect Hamas the most, and throughout his tenure, no Hamas leader set foot in Tunisia. Even during the harshest times, there was no official contact between Bin ‘Ali’s regime and Hamas, such as during the war on GS. But today (After the Tunisian revolution and the ouster of Bin ‘Ali), Tunisia has received Hamas with open arms, welcoming its leaders on its soil. The Tunisians have also proven to be among the most pro-Palestinian, pro-resistance peoples.

As regards the Gaddafi regime, Hamas saw it as extremely fickle when it came to the Palestinian issue, confusing its national calculations. He did not deal with it with a clear vision, and had many demands and complicated psychological considerations, making him a heavy burden on the resistance and the Palestinian issue as a whole.

After the success of the revolution in Libya, Hamas hoped that Libya would establish a regime that supported Palestinian resistance and deal with it positively. It also hoped that it would represent an important strategic depth, especially that since day one, it had raised slogans supporting the rights of the Palestinians to liberate the land and determine their fate. Some Libyan revolutionary brigades had even Palestinian names.

Hamas hoped that the “Arab Spring” would produce a new regional order different from the previous one which would create a climate that supported the Palestinian movement and greatly influence the Palestinian issue. This would open the door wide for Hamas to engage in this new order in an effective and positive manner. The preliminary indications prior to the military coup in Egypt inched towards forming a nurturing regional environment for Hamas in the near future, slowly ending its political isolation. Thus integrating it as a movement with a popular resistant extension on the one hand, and as a representative of the Palestinian people emanating from the ballot boxes, on the other hand.⁸¹

Meanwhile, the new Arab regimes began raising the level of their engagement with Hamas, dealing positively with its government in GS, and extending a helping hand to rebuild infrastructure and boost the economy there. These regimes also supported Hamas against the Israeli aggression and siege, for example during the historic visits of the Arab foreign ministers at the height of the war on GS in late 2012.

⁸¹ Ibrahim al-Madhoun, Hamas and the Arab Spring, site of Filastin Alaam, 19/12/2011, <http://paltimes.net/details/news> (in Arabic)

In the first two years, Hamas thought that the new Arab order would open its closed doors before it, and that it might see a real breakthrough in its relationship with the West, over issues like recognition, improving its role in any future arrangements, and removing it from “terrorist” lists. For it was no longer possible to continue “vetoing” Hamas when the MB movement or “political Islam” was being welcomed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Morocco. But the counter attack against the “Arab Spring” which reached its peak with the military coup in Egypt on 3/7/2013, made Hamas less hopeful about the future. The suffering of the movement increased when the military state in Egypt insisted on strangling GS and destroying the tunnels concurrently with the Israeli siege. All of this was in tandem with a fierce media campaign against Hamas, launched by the Egyptians and some Gulf related media outlets.

In general, Arab conditions are unstable, where some Arab regimes are still forming. They are witnessing a conflict between the public’s aspiration, the will of tyrannical regimes and foreign intervention.

Eighth: Hamas’s Popular Relations

1. The Islamic National Conference and the Conference of Arab Parties

Hamas sought to be an integral part of these conferences and their regular summits and press communiqués. This was been reflected in the major situations experienced by the movement, during military confrontations with Israel, the siege imposed on it and during elections.

This effort reached such an advanced degree that the Islamic National Conference named its seventh session held in the Lebanese capital Beirut on 5–6/2/2009 “The Gaza Session,” and saluted the people of GS for their patience and sacrifice, and the historical victory of their resistance in the war waged by Israel in late 2008 and early 2009 on GS.⁸²

In its statements, the Islamic National Conference also consistently sent warm salutes to the heroic resistance in GS, especially Hamas and other armed factions, which thwarted the objectives of the “US-International conspiracy,” and fought

⁸² *Al-Hayat*, 11/2/2009.

the “Zionist army” and stopped it from invading Gaza, dealing it an unprecedented military failure on the “land of free Palestine.”⁸³

Hamis’s efforts with the organizers of these conferences succeeded in enlisting their help to break the siege of GS and open all border crossings, especially the Rafah crossing, without conditions or Israeli dictates, continue sending ships to Gaza carrying building and other materials, and adopt the idea of a Popular Congress to support GS, opening its membership to all international supporters.

2. Normalization Campaigns

Hamis believes that the most dangerous project for the Palestinian issue, in addition to peace accords with Israel, involves Israeli efforts to boost normalization with the Arab peoples, and not just governments, of which many did not sever ties with Tel Aviv, even after the second *Intifadah*, whether these ties are overt or covert. But what Israel wants goes beyond events, meetings, and covert economic exchanges, because it wants normalization to wipe out “anti-Israel hatred,” which increased during the *al-Aqsa Intifadah*.⁸⁴

Hamis called on the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to shoulder their responsibilities and stop the bid by some Arab and Muslim countries for normalization with Israel. It expressed its surprise at the PA’s weak position on the matter, for normalization with the enemy undermines the resistance of the Palestinian people. Hamis cautioned that everyone must realize the danger normalization poses to the Palestinian people, and demanded resolute actions and decisions against it.

During its participation in popular Arab and Islamic anti-normalization events, it pointed out that experience has shown that all diplomatic ties and normalization with the enemy have not benefited any Arab or Muslim country, but that they harmed the Palestinian issue and the interests of the Palestinian people. Hamis expressed its surprise over these normalization trends, at a time when Palestinian land remains under occupation, Palestinian prisoners remain incarcerated, and all forms of aggression continue to be visited upon the Palestinians.⁸⁵

⁸³ Final Communiqué of the 2009 Seventh Session of the Islamic National Conference, Beirut, 5–6/2/2009, <http://www.islamicnational.org/Home/material.php?id=314&s=1> (in Arabic)

⁸⁴ Yasir al-Za’atra, Hamas and Arab Normalization, *Addustour*, 2/12/2007. (in Arabic)

⁸⁵ *Al-Risalah*, 17/10/2005.

3. Campaigns to Break the Siege

From the first moment following its victory in the legislative elections in early 2006, Hamas saw that the international embargo imposed on the Palestinians was an unjust measure subject to Israeli pressure. Hamas thus encouraged Palestinian, Arab, and international campaigns to break the siege amid international silence over the blockade, and the intensifying humanitarian suffering of over 1.5 million Palestinians who live in GS.

Hamas kept pace with the early beginnings of international solidarity campaigns, which later on would organize land and sea convoys to break the siege, rejecting Israel's collective punishment, and shedding light on the Gazans' suffering, while trying to ease it by bringing in aid. Hamas was interested primarily in receiving land solidarity convoys, as the most successful way to arrive to GS and bring in aid. However, maritime convoys were better able to shed political and media light on the blockade, especially as they included parliamentarians and political figures from a large number of countries around the world.

Although campaigns to break the siege did not all succeed in reaching GS, they were able to make several achievements, benefiting Hamas greatly, as follows:

- a. Rejecting Israel's collective punishment policy against GS, expressing solidarity with them, removing any ethical and political legitimacy for the blockade, and rejecting official international silence over it.
- b. Exposing the magnitude of Israel's violations against the Palestinians and the extent of its disregard for international law.
- c. Establishing a coordinated campaign of solidarity with the Palestinians in GS, and the Palestinian issue as a whole, through the broad participation of solidarity activists from all around the world.
- d. Bringing in quantities of relief, food, and medical aid and supplies sorely needed by GS.⁸⁶

Thus, being the party politically targeted by the blockade, Hamas welcomed the attempts to break the siege, and sought to benefit from them politically and in the media. It contributed to exposing the suffering of the Gazans and the ugliness

⁸⁶ Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, "Attempts to Break the Siege on Gaza... To Where?," Strategic Assessment series (37), September 2011, www.alzaytouna.net/permalink/4348.html (in Arabic)

of the Israeli collective punishment. Hamas also supported and encouraged these attempts, where its high-level figures honored solidarity activists reaching GS.

4. Hamas and Charity Work

Hamas, since its inception, sought to reach out to social institutions, within its strategy to reach out to the masses. It benefited from the financial support provided by Arab official and non-official sources, to build a complex network of welfare institutions focusing on many areas, such as health, education, and kindergartens. They provided a highly organized and effective alternative to governmental institutions, providing low cost high quality services, while focusing on educational and behavioral aspects that promoted the Islamic and national spirit.

In its relations with donor Arab, Islamic, and international institutions, Hamas sought to make charities and popular donations a key method for spreading out in society. Thus, establishing kindergartens, schools, libraries, blood banks, and clinics, as well as vocational training centers for women and sports club, not to mention collecting donations and charity to help the needy and expand the activities of charitable groups.

Hamas also focused in its appeals for funding and aid from those official and popular institutions on building clinics and daily shelters providing free meals, as well as on providing assistance to repair thousands of homes in the refugee camps damaged as a result of storms and Israeli demolitions. This is addition to establishing funds to help poor students complete their studies in and outside Palestine, and offering urgent assistance to families that suffer from calamities such as bombardment of homes, or the detention of their sole breadwinner, leaving a good impact on people's hearts and minds.

Conclusion

This study did not focus on narrating the history of Hamas's pan-Arab relations and their developments over the past years, but chose instead to shed light on their foundations and on evaluating their future. This is especially important after Hamas's position shifted from the opposition in the Palestinian political system to being power, even if only on part of the Palestinian territories in GS.

The study confirmed that Hamas has expressed its vision of its relations with Arab official and popular parties, explaining the foundations and Hamas's bid to establish good, strong and sound relations with all sides, thus hoping these parties would side with the Palestinian people in confronting the Israeli occupation. At the same time, Hamas was careful not to interfere in these countries' affairs, seeking to improve relations with important actors vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, without having to pay prices like abandoning core beliefs, principles, ideas, and rights.

The climate of change and uprisings in the Arab world continues to cast its shadow on Hamas's relations with the Arab regimes. The state of flux and instability continues to impose itself in the region, creating opportunities and broad horizons for Hamas, but also new challenges and dangers, such as the ones that started to emerge in the aftermath of the military coup in Egypt.