

Chapter Nine

Hamas and the Muslim World *Case Studies of Turkey and Iran*

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Introduction

The announcement of Hamas's launch in 1987 as an Islamic resistance movement fighting against the Israeli occupation coincided with the first Palestinian *Intifadah*. This *Intifadah* would last around seven years, and through its participation, Hamas gained prominence and a reputation for effectiveness. However, events did not take place in a vacuum and we cannot ignore the influence of the Arab and Muslim world on the Palestinian issue. Hamas would thus attempt to forge ties across the Arab world, though it was not in its best shape during that period. Indeed, it was a period of unrest and apprehension in most Arab and Muslim countries, and the wager on a political settlement to the Palestinian question had grown following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which drove out the PLO and Palestinian fighters from the country.

During that period, the Iraqi-Iranian war, which broke out in 1980, was still raging for its seventh year. Arab-Iranian relations had deteriorated severely because of that conflict. A year after the founding of Hamas, in 1988, Syrian-Turkish tensions escalated, because of Syria's sheltering of the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan—PKK*) Abdullah Öcalan. Turkey even mobilized its troops along the Syrian border, before the two countries managed to reach a settlement. During the same period, Turkish-Israeli relations developed from mutual visits to joint military and economic cooperation. It may not be a coincidence at all that the Turkish President Turgut Özal, in the same period, called for building a "Water for Peace" project, where Israel and Arab countries would share water resources with Turkey. In 1987, Israel was still occupying large parts of southern Lebanon and the western Beqaa', in spite of its partial withdrawal in 1985.

Not far from Iran and Turkey, Afghanistan in 1987 had already been under a seven-year old Soviet occupation, and its people were fighting to repel the invaders. Strikingly, Muslim youths from Arab and Muslim countries, including even Palestinians, flocked to fight in Afghanistan. Afghanistan took all the

limelight, and the “*jihad*” called by many Arab and Islamic media outlets was a call to fight the Soviets.

The establishment of Hamas was declared in 1987, in this Arab-Islamic environment, preoccupied with the Soviet invasion, the Iraq-Iran war, and Syrian-Turkish brinkmanship, as well as Iranian-Saudi tensions and evolving Turkish-Israeli ties. In other words, there was nothing in this regional environment that allowed Hamas to receive the proper attention it needed in its early days.

But the ability of the *Intifadah* to continue and be sustained, despite all the Israeli pressure, and the prominent role Hamas played in it, would transform the Islamic Resistance Movement into a major Palestinian actor, and at the center of pan-Arab and pan-Islamic attention. This would allow it later to forge ties with most Muslim and Arab countries. But the nature of these relations would differ between one country and another, and so would the support Hamas would receive from them, depending on the attitudes of a given country on the conflict with Israel, resistance movements, and the *Intifadah*.

The doors to regional regimes would not stay closed in Hamas’s face. In 1988, the Iraq-Iran war ended, and the normalization of Arab-Iranian relations ensued. The Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988, after which the Afghans began a bitter internal conflict over power. In Lebanon, from 1988 onwards, a significant new phase of resistance against Israeli occupation began.

Since its inception, Hamas faced the effects of important strategic shifts in Arab and Muslim countries, especially the Madrid Peace Conference, which sought to turn the page not only on the *Intifadah*, but the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. After the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in early August 1990, and the ensuing international drive to push Iraq out of Kuwait by force (Operation Desert Storm), the US convened the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, to “solve the Palestinian question and end the Arab-Israeli conflict.” Washington and Europe rallied support for the conference from various Arab and Muslim countries, where most of them would participate in its sessions... For this reason, Hamas faced a tough equation from the outset: its need for support and backing from its Arab-Islamic surrounding versus its fears that these countries would recognize the enemy and end the conflict. As a result, Hamas sought to express its desire for independence on the one hand, but also its need for support and backing on the other, through its founding document, which states:

1. Hamas seeks to establish contact with various Arab and Islamic stakeholders (countries, organizations, parties, and individuals) and establish positive relations with them, regardless of their orientations, or ideological, political, sectarian, or ethnic affiliations, to encourage them to do their duty towards the Palestinian people and support their just cause. Hamas is keen on sustaining relations and contacts with various Arab and Islamic stakeholders, as long as they serve the Palestinian cause.
2. Hamas does not interfere in the internal affairs of Arab and Muslim countries, but refuses at the same time for these countries to interfere in its own policies, attitudes, and affairs.
3. Hamas has no battle to fight with any Arab or Islamic party. For this reason, it does not adopt a policy of attacking any Arab or Islamic side, but instead expresses objectively and in a way that is compliant with the ethics of Islam in criticizing various sides and their attitudes toward the conflict with Israel.
4. Hamas considers Palestine the first and foremost battlefield with the Israeli enemy, and is keen on not taking the battle outside occupied Palestine. However, it does not denounce any military action against the Israeli occupation launched from any place outside of Palestine.
5. Hamas explains to various stakeholders that the aim of its relations with them is to find support for its work against the Israeli occupation, and that they are not aimed against any regime or organization.
6. Hamas calls for unity among the Arab and Muslim countries, blesses all related efforts that serve the interests of these countries, as well as the Palestinian issue, and attempts to help reconcile disputes.
7. Hamas looks with apprehension at the emergence of conflicting alliances and axes among the Arab and Muslim countries, and refuses to be part of any of them.
8. Hamas seeks to find balance in its political relations with the Arab and Muslim countries, and refuses for them to be at the expense of any other Arab or Islamic party.¹

Based on this founding political-ideological vision, Hamas worked to forge relations with various Arab and Muslim countries.

¹ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarasah al-Siyasiyyah*; and Hamas Charter, see site of OnIslam, documents and statements, <http://www.onislam.net> (in Arabic)

First: Hamas and the Organization of the Islamic Conference

This organization, which was rebranded as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on 28/6/2011, did not have any special relations with Hamas or any other resistance movement. The OIC, as regards the conflict with Israel, rejected any Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, denounced Israeli policies that obstructed negotiations with the Palestinians, and called for the establishment of a Palestinian state. However, the OIC at the same time reflected the attitudes of the political regimes of its member states, and not the peoples of these states. Consequently, the OIC generally backed the strategy of peace with Israel, and was more consistent with the positions of moderate Arab countries. These states also adopt the notion of establishing a Palestinian state in the WB and GS, in return for recognizing and normalizing relations with Israel. When negotiations stop or the Israelis continue the construction of settlements, the OIC addresses the US and the international community to pressure Israel to stop or to return to negotiations. In other words, the OIC does not call for resistance in the face of Israeli intransigence.

For this reason, with the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, the OIC issued a statement of clear support and “reassurance by the ongoing peace process to achieve a just peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338... with an emphasis on the unconditional withdrawal to pre-1967 borders, and the respect of the principle of land for peace.” In another example the OIC, during an emergency meeting held in Malaysia, called on the US to withdraw its support from then-Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s plan to withdraw from GS, saying that it “damaged the peace process.” The call was made in the final statement of an emergency meeting that brought together 13 out of 57 members of the OIC at the request of the PA, after then-US President George W. Bush backed the disengagement plan where the Israeli army would unilaterally withdraw from GS.

Then, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, whose country was holding the OIC presidency, stated that the US president’s support for Sharon’s plan for unilateral disengagement was regrettable, and was incompatible with the roadmap for peace. He said that the US must play the role of an “honest broker.”² When Saudi King ‘Abdullah met with then Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf,

² *Almustaqbal*, 23/4/2004.

following Hamas's victory in the Palestinian general election, they said that they hoped "Hamas would form a government that works to advance peace."³

When Malaysia welcomed Hamas's victory in the elections, it stated that the goal for peace in the Middle East could only be achieved through dialogue and negotiations.⁴ Even Afghan President Hamid Karzai, when he in turn welcomed Hamas's victory, said that statements that cast doubt on Israel's right to exist are not in the interest of the Palestinian people. Karzai advised Hamas to deal with Israel as "a nation and a people." He said that Afghanistan wants a sovereign Palestinian state, but it fully recognizes the right of Israel to exist as a state representing a nation, stressing that Afghanistan sees this a matter of principle. The Afghan president did not rule out establishing diplomatic relations with Israel.⁵

The representatives of the OIC do not separate their keenness on achieving Palestinian reconciliation and achieving peace with Israel. When Indonesian Foreign Minister Hasan Wirajuda wanted an end to the fighting between Fatah and Hamas, he said that he was making efforts with other Western mediators to persuade the Islamic Resistance Movement to participate with a high-level delegation in an international conference in Jakarta. It was dedicated to pushing Hamas towards more moderate positions close to international conditions, with the idea that Indonesia is a moderate Islamic country and it would push Hamas toward more moderation.⁶

The OIC did not issue statements supporting resistance operations, in effect, the OIC rejected "martyrdom operations"⁷ carried out by Hamas and other Palestinian factions, such as the one Hamas orchestrated in Jerusalem. OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu wrote on the organization's website that he felt concerned

³ *Al-Hayat*, 3/2/2006.

⁴ Malaysian National News Agency-Bernama, 27/1/2006, <http://www.bernama.com/arabic/v2/> (in Arabic)

⁵ *Addustour*, 28/1/2006.

⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 1/2/2007.

⁷ 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.

by the killing of (Israeli) students in West Jerusalem.⁸ A Hamas spokesman responded, on 8/3/2008, by expressing his deep resentment of these statements as they provided a pretext for the occupation to justify its crimes, and called on Arabs and Muslims to continue to support the cause of the Palestinian people.⁹

The OIC supported dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, encouraging reconciliation between them, and tried to play a direct role in this effort. The OIC secretary general called for ending strife and for holding a national Palestinian dialogue, and also appealed to all Palestinian factions to deal positively with Mahmud ‘Abbas’s call for dialogue. But the OIC rejected calls for sending international troops to GS to prevent infighting. The OIC secretary general stated that what was required was not an external force but the promotion of understanding between internal forces.¹⁰

The secretary general of the OIC also mediated between Fatah and Hamas, as tension and armed clashes between the two sides escalated in GS. He made several visits to Arab and Muslim countries for this purpose. Ihsanoğlu also visited GS and WB, and met with officials from Fatah and Hamas... After that visit, the OIC published the terms of the “truce agreement” between Fatah and Hamas, which included three items: comprehensive de-escalation in the Palestinian territories; the withdrawal of all armed manifestations and an end to protests; and the formation of an independent judicial committee. The OIC called for the resumption of national dialogue between all factions, especially Fatah and Hamas, without any preconditions. The statement said that the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas and Prime Minister Isma‘il Haniyyah had agreed for the OIC and its Secretary General to play a key role in the implementation of this agreement and the achievement of its objectives. The OIC condemned all acts of violence in the GS and WB, no matter which party was responsible for them.¹¹

In the context of the OIC’s bid to broker dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, the President of Senegal and the OIC Chairman Abdoulaye Wade called for hosting delegates from Fatah and Hamas to start a fraternal dialogue. According to the

⁸ Al Arabiya news, 7/3/2008; and *Asharq Alawsat*, 8/3/2008.

⁹ *Al-Hayat*, 9/3/2008.

¹⁰ *Asharq Alawsat*, 15/6/2007.

¹¹ *Al-Khaleej*, 28/6/2007.

spokesperson for the Senegalese president, the first phase of the dialogue would be intra-Palestinian, while the second would involve peace talks with Israel.¹² After the Israeli assault on GS, the OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu visited GS, and met with officials from Hamas, “in a message of solidarity with the people of Gaza.”¹³

The foreign ministers of seven Muslim countries—KSA, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Indonesia, and Malaysia, at the invitation of Pakistan—met to endorse the “Mecca Agreement” between Fatah and Hamas, and discuss Muslim world issues, especially the Palestinian issue. Diplomats familiar with what took place behind the scenes said that the summit was designed to support the Mecca Agreement, persuade the US to work on the resumption of the peace process, and pressure Hamas to accept the conditions of the Middle East Quartet to resolve the conflict.¹⁴

Therefore, it is possible to say that the most prominent relationship Hamas had with some member states of the OIC included Turkey and Iran. While Hamas’s ties to other member states were strictly within the framework of the OIC, ranging from visits, gestures of solidarity, attempts at mediation, or opposition to Israeli assaults. Hamas’s relationship with Turkey and Iran had a different political and strategic nature, given the role these two countries play in the Middle East, and given their different strategies regarding the Palestinian issue and Israel, and the means of confrontation with the latter.

Second: Hamas and Turkey

Since the creation of the state of Israel, Turkey has established full diplomatic ties with it, and has not aided the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation. Rather, Turkey and its neighbor Iran were part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) strategy to counter and limit Soviet influence in the Middle East. This alliance favored the establishment of Israel and defended the latter. Enunciated by David Ben-Gurion, the “periphery doctrine,” as a strategic approach to the Middle East, derived from the perception that Israel was surrounded by a

¹² *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 8/6/2006.

¹³ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/3/2009.

¹⁴ *Assafir*, 22/7/2007.

wall of Arab states. Accordingly, Israel set out to establish relations with supportive countries, like Turkey and Iran, on the periphery of these states.¹⁵ This means that in line with its Western alliance and its secular military junta, Turkey sided with Israeli policies. But a gradual change in the policies of “Islamic” Turkey began in the mid-1990s, after the leader of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) Necmettin Erbakan came to power in 1996. This would later pave the way for a different Turkish approach to the issues of the Muslim world, led by the Palestinian question. Later on, this would develop into direct ties between the ruling Islamic party the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi—AKP*) and Hamas.

The AKP was founded on 14/8/2001, after splitting from the Islamic Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*) and its leader Necmettin Erbakan. The AKP took power in 2002. The party classes itself as a moderate conservative party, not hostile to the West and adopting the free market economic model, it seeks Turkey’s accession to the European Union (EU). The AKP is keen not to use religious slogans in its political discourse.¹⁶ Perhaps this is due to the AKP’s acceptance of the secular state and its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and its unwillingness to provoke the army and the military, “the protector of the Constitution and secularism” in Turkey.

The AKP wanted Turkey to have an active and influential role in the region. This was the gist of the thesis advanced by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, in his famous book “The Strategic Depth.”¹⁷ Davutoğlu emphasized Turkey’s ability to strengthen relations with the leaders of countries in the region and their peoples through a “zero problem policy with neighbors,” allowing Turkey to play an active role in its surroundings and turn into a central country that everyone needs.

¹⁵ Yossi Alpher, “Israel’s Troubled Relationship with Turkey and Iran: The “Periphery” Dimension,” site of Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution–NOREF, 20/12/2010, p. 2, http://peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/69654c7bac7e39cea38bb20c7ea7efd5.pdf

¹⁶ Information Department, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, *Turkya wa al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah* (Turkey and the Palestinian Issue), Information Report (17) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2010), pp. 32–33.

¹⁷ Ahmet Davutoglu, *Al-'Umq al-Istratiji, Mauqi' Turkya wa Dawruha fi al-Saha al-Duwaliyyah* (The Strategic Depth, Turkey’s Position and Role in the International Arena) (Qatar: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2010).

This new strategic direction for Turkey towards the Arab and Muslim surrounding would allow the AKP to play new roles vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue. These roles would become the subject of much interest for the region's governments, and of hope for their peoples, political forces, and resistance movements. Thus under the AKP, especially from 2006 onwards, there was broad popular Turkish participation in solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people, from fundraising, to protests against assaults on GS following the capture of Gilad Shalit in late June 2006, and then the resignation of a group of Turkish MPs from the Turkey-Israel Interparliamentary Friendship Group.¹⁸

1. The Determinants of Turkish Policy Towards Hamas

The main determinants of Turkish policy toward Hamas, and toward the question of Palestine in general, under the AKP, can be summarized as follows:

- a. Responding to the sentiment of Islamic belonging, heritage, and the popular will of the Turkish people in supporting the Palestinian issue. Consequently, this means supporting the political and humanitarian issues related to Palestine and rallying broad segments of pro-Palestinian anti-Israeli Turks.
- b. The Islamic and conservative background of the party, provided that this does not adversely affect its program and internal conditions, or its regional and international ties.
- c. Dealing with the issue of Palestine as the gateway to the issues of the Arab region and the Middle East, to play an active role in the regional environment around Turkey.
- d. Adopting a gradual approach, whereby the ability of the ruling party to provide support and adopt political stances is commensurate with its internal strength and resilience.
- e. Turkey's membership in the US-led NATO, and taking into account the desire of the ruling party in Turkey to accede into the EU, and therefore not exceeding the ceiling of policies or red lines that could lead to a crisis in the relations with these powers.
- f. Turkey's official relations with Israel, economic, political and military ties. A gradual approach is therefore needed to scale back or dismantle the relationship, or to take strong positions towards Israel, without shaking up the status of the ruling party internally, or putting it in direct confrontation with the West.

¹⁸ Information Department, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, *Turkya wa al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah*, p. 33.

g. The AKP is aware that it has to operate under a secular political system, in an environment governed by democracy and the ballot box, and that it has many rivals on the domestic scene, and that the Western world has various modes of influence through which it can defeat the AKP an elections by distorting its image or fabricating crises. Thus, the AKP has to take into account the terms of the political game, the robustness of the front, and its popular base.

Accordingly, the AKP would adhere to the general Arab and Islamic ceiling in supporting the peace process in Palestine, back the Arab peace initiative, and refrain from engaging in open support for the Palestinian resistance or openly defy Western powers and Israel. Instead, the AKP would stick to the “gray area,” and would gradually raise its ceiling by as much as its internal, regional, and international position allows. However, the AKP would remain far below the open Iranian ceiling in support of the Palestinian resistance, and calling for the dismantlement of the state of Israel.

2. Support for Hamas’s Legitimacy

Despite the shifts in Turkey’s foreign policy toward the Arab-Islamic arena, and growing Turkish interest in the Palestinian question under the AKP, there have been no direct relations between the latter, which has been in power since 2002, and Hamas, except after the latter won in the general election in January 2006. Turkey thus established early contacts with Hamas, despite Western and Israeli objections. The government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s official position was to call for dialogue with Hamas and for its inclusion to political and diplomatic efforts to find a solution to the Palestinian issue.

On 28/3/2006, two months after the Palestinian general election, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a statement urging “the international community to adopt an unprejudiced approach towards the new Hamas-led Palestinian government and called for it to be offered the opportunity to fulfill its responsibilities.” The statement hoped that “the Palestinian government will address the urgent problems on its agenda with a sense of responsibility and in a constructive manner and that violence and bloodshed in the region will come to an end.”¹⁹

¹⁹ *Hürriyet Daily News* newspaper, Istanbul, 31/3/2006, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ankara-urges-giving-a-chance-to-hamas-led-govt.aspx?pageID=438&n=ankara-urges-giving-a-chance-to-hamas-led-govt8217t-2006-03-31>

In March 2006, Khalid Mish'al was invited to visit Ankara for talks with senior officials at the Turkish Foreign Ministry. His delegation, which included Usamah Hamdan, the representative of the movement in Lebanon, met with Turkey's Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül. In an interview with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on 2/2/2006, he said, "Hamas won the Palestinian election and we must respect the decision of the Palestinian people..." Turkey saw that one of the most important conditions for the success of Turkish mediation between the Palestinians and Israel is inclusion of all Palestinian forces, including Hamas, which won a majority of parliamentary seats.

On 12/5/2010, President Gül reiterated that because Hamas had won the elections they could not be ignored.²⁰ To emphasize Turkey's recognition of Hamas's popularity and legitimacy and influence, and in order to give Hamas a place in the peace process, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu met with Hamas's political bureau chief Khalid Mish'al in Damascus on 23/7/2010. Turkey continued to defend Hamas as a political movement and not a terrorist movement; Erdoğan stated, "Hamas are resistance fighters who are struggling to defend their land. They have won an election," and "I have told this to US officials... I do not accept Hamas as a terrorist organization. I think the same today. They are defending their land."²¹

3. Supporting the Peace Process and the Inclusion of Hamas in it

Despite Turkey's support for the Palestinian people, and its denunciation of Israeli assaults on this people, the leaders of the AKP do not reject the principle of negotiations and peaceful settlement between the Palestinians and Israelis. At state level, Turkey would choose the peace process, and AKP leaders would work on achieving balance in the country's relations with the Israelis and the Palestinians.

When Abdullah Gül, the Turkish foreign minister, visited the headquarters the PA in Ramallah on 4/1/2005, he said that the methods used by Israel against the Palestinian people... will not bring security and comfort for it. Gül added that Israel should arrange the withdrawal from GS with the PA, and place it in the context of the implementation of the Road Map, as this would represent a serious chance to relaunch the peace process and return to the negotiating table, noting

²⁰ *Asharq Alawsat*, 13/5/2010.

²¹ Hamas is not terrorist group: Turkey's Erdogan, site of Al Arabiya English, 4/6/2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/06/04/110434.html>

that Turkey was ready to help both sides in order to reach a peace agreement.²² For Gül, the “only way” to achieve peace would be a comprehensive agreement based on co-existence between the states of Palestine and Israel, while reaching a peace agreement in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the UN is the ideal solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict.²³

Through this vision of Turkey, which emphasizes the priority of peace and negotiation to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan believes that it is not possible to achieve this peace without the involvement of Hamas as a key party in the equation. In other words, Erdoğan wants Hamas to be a partner in the negotiation process, after receiving the recognition of Israel and the US. Erdoğan announced this on 15/6/2005 after his meeting with the US Envoy to the Middle East, George Mitchell.²⁴

Hamas’s victory in PLC elections on 25/1/2006 did not alter the main features of Turkish policy regarding the priority of peace and negotiations. Instead, this victory encouraged the Turkish government to defend the legitimacy of Hamas’s participation in the peace process and in the negotiations over this process, in return for Hamas’s renouncement of armed resistance. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a few weeks after Hamas’s victory, declared that he had discussed with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf a joint initiative, in which the OIC would take up a role, mediating between Israel and the Palestinians. The most important thing about this initiative, which Erdoğan planned with the Pakistani president, came from the bid to explain to Hamas that its non-recognition of Israel will not help in this process. In return for recognizing Israel, the latter must not declare that it would not recognize the results of the elections or Hamas in the government. Erdoğan did not stop at that, but addressed Hamas directly, saying that Hamas must leave violent tactics in the past. They must enter a new world with a new outlook, now that they have practically become part of the government. Then, in what appeared to be a kind of congruence with PA discourse, Erdoğan stressed that arms should be solely in the hands of the armed forces of any country. He said that in this regard, he was convinced that Hamas would move toward the center,

²² Information Department, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, *Turkya wa al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah*, p. 36.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

because extremism would not help in anything, and this applied to Israel as well. Erdoğan then called for distinguishing Hamas now from Hamas of yesterday.²⁵

The declared AKP policy wanted Hamas to move away from violence and to recognize Israel to achieve peace in the Middle East. For this reason, when the AKP-led government's welcoming of a Hamas delegation to visit Ankara on 16/2/2006, sparked controversy and objection in the corridors of the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Erdoğan defended the visit by saying that Ankara was seeking a greater role in the Middle East. Erdoğan said that Turkey could not sit idly by, and that Turkish officials had told Hamas's delegation the position of the international community regarding the need to abandon violence and recognize Israel. He said that they had sent the right message at the right time.²⁶

Following the Israeli assault on GS in late 2008 and early 2009, Turkey re-stressed that its vision for a solution was identical to the Arab peace initiative, which would lead to a Palestinian state. This was expressed explicitly by Abdullah Gül, who said that they supported the Arab peace initiative, and they believe it is the best solution to the problems of the region.²⁷ Erdoğan stressed that he was not biased in favor of Hamas when he criticized strongly the Israeli government for its war on GS. He said that those who think that Ankara is with Hamas against Israel are mistaken... Turkey wants peace.²⁸ Prior to that, Foreign Minister Ali Babacan called on Hamas, only a month after the GS war, to pursue a peaceful policy to achieve its objectives, rather than armed struggle.²⁹

The Turkish condemnation of the Israeli aggression on GS and the unjust siege did not change the stated Turkish strategy of pursuing peace. Therefore, when Turkey presented its vision for a ceasefire through a political initiative, the Turkish *Sabah* newspaper reported on 3/1/2009 that the initiative would see an immediate ceasefire in GS, prepare the ground for the resumption of peace negotiations through the deployment of peacekeeping forces in GS, and restore the truce between Hamas and Israel.³⁰

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁷ *Assafir*, 6/2/2009.

²⁸ *Asharq Alawsat*, 15/2/2009.

²⁹ *Addustour*, 28/1/2009.

³⁰ Muhammad Nouredine, "The Bases of Turkish Policy Towards the Palestinian Issue," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, issue 82, Spring 2010, p. 46. (in Arabic)

Turkey's calls for Hamas to engage in the political process continued even after the Israeli aggression on GS. These calls even became more explicit and overt after that aggression. Spokesman of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Burak Özügergin stated that "Ankara believed that Hamas was at a crossroads and must choose between taking up arms and engaging in the political process." Babacan had told the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* and other 'papers on 27/1/2009, "Hamas must clearly specify its position regarding the conflict in the Middle East. Hamas must decide whether it wants to be an armed group or a political movement. Our proposal is for Hamas to operate within the framework of the Palestinian political system."³¹

In the same context, some reports indicated that there was a two-stage Turkish plan to address the situation in GS after the Israeli assault:

- a. Achieve a cease-fire, with international peacekeepers with the participation of Turkish and Arab forces.
- b. Achieve accord among the Palestinian factions in preparation for peace talks with Israel.³²

When Erdoğan attended as a guest in the regular session of the 22nd Arab summit, which was held in the Libyan city of Sirte on 27–28/3/2010, he said that one of the most crucial problems that require speedy solutions in our region, is the Palestinian problem... Today, the international community faces a difficult, new test in reviving the peace process... the responsibility of the parties at this stage is to give peace an honest chance....³³

Even when Ankara's relations with Tel Aviv deteriorated, following the Israeli raid on the Mavi Marmara boat, killing nine Turkish activists, with Israel rejecting Turkey's demand to apologize for the massacre, Erdoğan saw that the problem was the aggressiveness of the Israeli government, rather than with the Israelis themselves. He said:

³¹ *Asharq Alawsat*, 18/1/2009.

³² *The Daily Star* newspaper, Beirut, 16/2/2009.

³³ Information Department, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, *Turkya wa al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah*, p. 38.

We have always been in a historical friendship and collaboration with the Israeli and Jewish people... [But] to make an operation on a civil ship, even the capture of the passengers is itself a crime. Attacking innocent people with arms, to shed blood, and to massacre is clearly state terrorism.³⁴

Contrary to the prevailing impressions that Turkey, after its dispute with Israel, moved to become completely at odds with Israel and on the side of the “Refusal Front,” it maintained its relationship with Hamas within sensitive calculations, which do not seek to sever the relationship with Israel completely, or enter into conflict with the US and Europe. Turkish Deputy Prime Minister and AKP leader, Hüseyin Çelik, flatly rejected alignment with Hamas in an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*, “because we are protecting the Palestinian People. The name could be Hamas or the PLO.”

On the other hand, some believe that Hamas’s relations with Turkey have evolved considerably, with the Turkish perception of Hamas being a favorable one; indeed, Hamas [until 2010] was received seven times in Istanbul, establishing multiple contacts with the government. For this reason, no one should expect the Turks to oppose the vision of Hamas or its policies. Many Hamas and MB movement meetings in Istanbul reveal the efforts of the AKP to link the participants in those meetings with Turkey, which shows that all those people belong to what is politically known as the “new Muslim world,” which seeks to confront Israel and oppose its policies and presence in the Middle East.

4. Supporting Hamas Against Aggression and the Blockade

AKP leaders stood repeatedly against Israeli practices in GS or in other cities and condemned Israeli attacks. Turkey denounced the assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, founder of Hamas, who was assassinated by Israel in 2004, calling it “a terrorist act” and the Israeli policy in GS “state-terrorism.”³⁵ But even under the rule of the AKP, Turkey remained cautious in declaring its support to the resistance against Israel.

³⁴ Full Text of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Speech on Israel’s Attack on Aid Flotilla, site of Dissident Voice, 2/6/2010, <http://dissidentvoice.org/2010/06/full-text-of-recep-tayyip-erdogans-speech-on-israels-attack-on-aid-flotilla/>

³⁵ *Alghad*, 25/7/2007.

After the 2006 PLC elections and the 2007 Hamas's takeover of GS, It became the main force in the strip, pitted against the PA led by Mahmud 'Abbas in Ramallah. It was now difficult for any country dealing with the Palestinian issue, the peace process, or the negotiations, to ignore Hamas. The latter had become key "player" whose views and reservations had to be heeded and taken into account, whether in the internal Palestinian equation, or in the conflict or negotiations with Israel.

The positions of the ruling AKP vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue became more pronounced following Israel's imposition of its blockade on GS. It called for its abolition repeatedly. The AKP also denounced the Israeli assault on GS in the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, and the "crimes" the Israeli army committed during the conflict. With Turkey's strategy of "zero problems," the Turkish role became acceptable to all sides, not just Hamas, which doesn't reject any support from any Arab or Muslim country to begin with, but also from Israel itself. Especially so since Turkey, through its relations with Hamas, would convey the latter's views to international and Western parties.³⁶

Erdoğan held Israel responsible for the assault on GS, arguing that Israel did not respect the terms of the truce despite Hamas's commitment to them. However, Erdoğan also held Hamas partly responsible, for firing rockets on Israeli settlements and fueling tensions. Furthermore, Turkey's efforts with Hamas during the assault on GS stressed the need to "not give Israel pretexts, and stop firing rockets from Gaza on Israel because they are 'useless'" as Abdullah Gül, stated more than once.³⁷ For his part, Erdoğan said that what happened was a blow to the Arab peace initiative.³⁸ Erdoğan deemed the Israeli assault "a humanitarian crime" that Israel had to stop. Erdoğan went on a wide tour to Arab countries to work on a joint Arab-Turkish position on the war.

After Erdoğan visited the Egyptian president on 1/1/2009, he called on Israel to announce an immediate ceasefire and end the blockade, and on Hamas to stop firing rockets.³⁹ He also dispatched his Foreign Policy Advisor Ahmet Davutoğlu, to participate in the negotiations between the Egyptian mediator on one hand and Hamas and the Arab states on the other hand.

³⁶ Information Department, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, *Turkya wa al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah*, p. 44.

³⁷ Muhammad Nouredine, "The Bases of Turkish Policy Towards the Palestinian Issue," p. 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Turkey also became the scene of many pro-Palestinian Islamic activities, which denounced Israel “for punishing an entire people.” Turkey consistently called for an end to the inhumane siege on GS. Turkey saw that defending the GS, and calling for aid, was tantamount to indirect support for Hamas, which has controlled GS since 2007.

Hamas’s relations with Turkey saw remarkable developments between 2012 and 2013, with numerous meetings taking place between the two sides. This helped achieve convergence between their views regarding the uprisings in the Arab world, and ensured political tension between Turkey and Israel continued. Early in 2012, Haniyyah met with Turkish officials and the leaders of all Turkish political parties without exception. One interesting statement in this regard was made by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who said that Haniyyah’s visit was proof that the road to Palestine passes through Turkey.⁴⁰ However, Haniyyah’s second tour, 30/1–16/2/2012, included Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran, UAE, and Egypt, gave out the impression that Hamas wanted to be independent and not bound by any particular party.

On 18/3/2012, Khalid Mish‘al, head of Hamas’s political bureau, started a regional tour, where he met Turkish President ‘Abdullah Gül and updated him on the latest developments of the Palestinian issue, the conditions of the Palestinian people, hostile Israeli practices, as well as the situation in Jerusalem, *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the holy sites and Judaization process. On 21/04/2012, Mish‘al met Davutoğlu in the Qatari capital Doha, and discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the latest developments in the Palestinian arena, including Palestinian national reconciliation.

A Hamas delegation headed by Khalid Mish‘al and Isma‘il Haniyyah visited Turkey and met Prime Minister Erdoğan on 18/6/2013 to discuss the major Palestinian issues. The Turkish government pledged to work on ending Israeli settlement activities in the WB, oppose the Judaization of Jerusalem, and work on lifting the GS siege, while promoting Palestinian reconciliation. Meanwhile, Erdoğan reaffirmed his wish to visit GS, mentioning that he may pay a surprise visit to the Strip at any time, and clarifying that his visit had been delayed due to incidents in his country (the Taksim protests).

⁴⁰ *Zaman* newspaper, Istanbul, 6/1/2012. (in Turkish)

Turkish diplomacy was considerably active in its support for Hamas and GS during the Israeli war, 14–21/11/2012, applying pressure in regional and international venues, and in cooperation with Egypt and Qatar, to end the attack and lift the siege. As a result, the GS received broad official and public support, forcing the Israelis to comply with the resistance’s conditions to end the assault, which the Israelis dubbed Operation Pillar of Defense, and Hamas dubbed Operation Stones of Baked Clay.

Erdoğan arrived in Egypt on 17/11/2012 as Hamas and Israel engaged in a fervent war, and met Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi, as well as the Prince of Qatar and Khalid Mish‘al, who demanded an end to the war and the siege. Such government diplomatic initiatives were active regionally and internationally to support the demands of the resistance. Erdoğan accused Israel of “ethnic cleansing by ignoring peace in this region and violating international law,” stating that it is “occupying the Palestinian territories step by step.” He added, “Israel will answer for the innocent blood it has shed so far,” and said the UN had “turned a blind eye” on Israeli attacks against Palestinians; referring to the UN failure to impose sanctions on Israel despite the resolutions issued against it.⁴¹

The Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu visited Gaza during the Israeli aggression on 20/11/2012, part of a delegation of Arab foreign ministers. He said there that Turkey would continue to support the Palestinian people in GS, WB and Jerusalem, to end the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital Jerusalem. Addressing the Palestinians in GS, he said, “Your pain is our pain,” he declared. “Your destiny is our destiny and your future is our future.”⁴²

The visit saw a number of symbolic expressions such as Davutoğlu kissing the hand of the mother of Ahmad Ja‘bari, deputy commander of the Ezzedeem al-Qassam Brigades, whose assassination by Israel was the spark to the 2012 Israeli war.⁴³ In another moving scene, Davutoğlu burst into tears at Al-Shifa’ hospital in GS, when he saw the dead and wounded there.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Site of Al Jazeera, 21/11/2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/2012112012739934900.html> (in English)

⁴² Will the Ceasefire Lead to Peace?, *The Economist* newspaper, London, 24/11/2012, <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21567140-after-week-long-war-between-israel-and-palestinians-temporary-cessation>

⁴³ *Asharq Alawsat*, 21/11/2012.

⁴⁴ *Assafir*, 21/11/2012.

On other levels, Turkish support to GS continued in different forms. The President of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA), Serdar Çam, met the mayors of GS municipalities on 28/3/2012 to take a closer look at the suffering caused by the Israeli siege. He also examined a number of important strategic projects funded previously by the Turkish government. Furthermore, the Interior Minister Fathi Hammad met his Turkish counterpart in Turkey in April 2013, and the Minister of Justice ‘Atallah Abu al-Sabah visited Turkey in June 2013 and discussed with his Turkish counterpart Sadullah Ergin the means of joint cooperation in the judiciary sector and supporting the Palestinian issue with regards to Israeli violations and ways to press international charges against Israeli crimes.

The medical authorities in GS received a medical delegation from the Filbel White Hands Association in April 2012, who performed the largest possible number of surgeries during one week. Moreover, the GS Ministry of Health signed a memorandum of understanding with the Turkish Red Crescent on 1/7/2013 to implement a resumption of furnishing and equipping the Shuhada al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, funded by the Program of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Reconstruction of Gaza and managed by the Islamic Development Bank.

5. Supporting Palestinian Reconciliation

Turkey believed that it was not possible to achieve progress in resolving the Palestinian issue without Palestinian reconciliation.⁴⁵ To be consistent with Turkish efforts for achieving reconciliation between Hamas and the Palestinian president, Turkey called on Hamas to renounce violence and recognize Israel. This was consistent with Turkey’s stance that Hamas should participate in the political process, linked to the continuation of the cease-fire with Israel, and then reconciliation with the Palestinian president. Turkey considers itself at the same distance from ‘Abbas and Hamas.⁴⁶ When Hamas took control of GS in June 2007, Erdoğan, on 23/7/2007 offered Haniyyah assistance in achieving Palestinian reconciliation. He told him that Turkey was ready to take action to heal the rift

⁴⁵ Muhammad Noureddine, “The Bases of Turkish Policy Towards the Palestinian Issue,” p. 28.

⁴⁶ Information Department, Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, *Turkya wa al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah*, p. 42.

and restore unity to the Palestinian ranks and that the continuation of the dispute adversely affects the establishment of a Palestinian state.⁴⁷

The Turkish offer did not receive the expected response for several reasons related to various Palestinian factions, Hamas and the PA were not prepared for this reconciliation. Regional parties, notably Egypt, also did not desire reconciliation at that stage, especially after Hamas's takeover of GS. Furthermore, Egypt did not want Turkey to play this leading role at the expense of its historical and strategic relationship with GS. Even the PA itself believed that no negotiation should take place with Hamas before it first backed down and ceded control of the GS, and re-admitted the PA's security forces—a stance that lasted until the second half of 2008. Cairo rejected an unofficial Turkish proposal to hold a meeting that included 'Amr Musa, the secretary-general of the League of Arab States, 'Omar Suleiman, director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Services (EGIS), and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, in addition to representatives of Fatah and Hamas in Egypt or in Turkey, in order to put pressure on the Palestinian parties to sign a reconciliation agreement. The Egyptian response was expressed by Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait, who said that the Egyptian role was limited to convincing Hamas to accept the Egyptian reconciliation document, and that there was no room to return to re-negotiate.⁴⁸

The Turkish interest in GS and reconciliation proved to be a sensitive issue for the Egyptian leadership, which saw it a boost for the MB movement in Egypt. This was anathema to the Egyptian regime, which saw it as interference in a sensitive issue that concerned Egypt. As a result, Egypt decided not to facilitate Turkish mediation between Fatah and Hamas, especially after the assault on GS.⁴⁹ For this reason Suleiman 'Awwad, spokesperson for the Egyptian presidency, stated that the Turkish role in the Palestinian reconciliation complemented and supported the Egyptian role, and Turkish President Abdullah Gül and his Foreign Minister reiterated this during their talks with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on 21/7/2010.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Muhammad Nouredine, "The Bases of Turkish Policy Towards the Palestinian Issue," p. 29.

The issue of Palestinian reconciliation remained unresolved. Turkey failed to play a direct role in this issue as it had hoped. But the shifts that took place in Egypt following the revolution of January 25, 2011, which deposed President Hosni Mubarak, propelled reconciliation efforts forward. Egypt was able to accomplish this in a surprising way, since it was itself still undergoing transition to a new regime. Thus, the two sides, Fatah and Hamas, signed a reconciliation agreement with direct Egyptian sponsorship on 4/5/2011, with support from Turkey, Iran, and the rest of the Arab and Muslim countries.

6. The Freedom Flotilla Incident and the Implications for Relations with Israel

Tensions between Turkey and Israel reached an unprecedented peak with the Israeli raid on the Freedom Flotilla on 31/5/2010, in which nine Turkish civilians on board the Mavi Marmara vessel were killed by Israel. This assault was the first manifestation of violent friction between Turkey and Israel, drawing a furious Turkish backlash against Israel in addition to an international outcry. Erdoğan and Davutoğlu dealt with the shock of the incident by demanding that Israel:

- a. Return the vessels to Turkey.
- b. Release all detained passengers of all nationalities.
- c. Issue an official apology to Turkey.
- d. Compensate the victims.
- e. Accept an international commission of inquiry.
- f. End the GS blockade.⁵⁰

Davutoğlu described the attack on the Freedom Flotilla as “Turkey’s 9/11.”⁵¹ Turkish PM Erdoğan made an impassioned speech at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on the afternoon of Tuesday 1/6/2010. He condemned Israeli piracy stating that “Turkey’s hostility is as strong as its friendship is valuable,” and that this attack “must be punished by all means,” and that “no one should test Turkey’s patience.”⁵²

⁵⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 2/6/2010.

⁵¹ *Milliyet* newspaper, Istanbul, 1/6/2010. (in Turkish)

⁵² *Today’s Zaman* newspaper, Istanbul, 1/6/2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-211844-no-one-should-test-turkeys-patience-pm-erdogan-warns.html>

The Freedom Flotilla incident was a turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations. Anti-Israeli statements reached a peak with quotes attributed to Ahmet Davutođlu, in which he said that Israel was an illegitimate state and doomed to extinction. Eli Bernstein, in a report for the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*, reporting from Ankara, quoted Davutođlu as saying in some interviews that “Israel cannot survive for a long time as an independent state, and a bi-national state shall be established between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan where Jews and Palestinians live together.”⁵³ During a visit to Lebanon on 24–25/11/2010, Erdoğan made strong statements against Israel, saying “We will not be silent and we will support justice by all means available to us.”⁵⁴

Davutođlu, in a meeting with Palestinian reporters in Ankara, said that the Turkish government and people were worried about the situation in Palestine. Palestine is not an ordinary issue, he added, it’s a sacred task on the Turks’ shoulders, Muslims and representatives of the nation that has sought to defend Jerusalem for more than four centuries.⁵⁵ For his part, President Gül declared that the issue of Jerusalem does not concern the Palestinians alone, but all Arabs and all Muslims.⁵⁶ Similarly, Erdoğan said, “Palestine is our problem, it has never been removed even for a day from our agenda.”⁵⁷ He also described Jerusalem as “the apple of the eye of each and every Muslim... and we cannot accept any Israeli violation in Jerusalem or in Muslim sites.”⁵⁸ On 10/5/2010, while addressing the second extraordinary meeting of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC, Erdoğan said, “If Jerusalem burns, the Middle East burns. If Jerusalem burns, the world burns.”⁵⁹

⁵³ *Assafir*, 29/12/2010.

⁵⁴ *Hürriyet Daily News*, 25/11/2010, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=turkey-will-not-remain-silent-if-israel-attacks-lebanon-2010-11-25>; and *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper, 25/11/2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3989901,00.html>

⁵⁵ *Al-Watan* newspaper, Abha (Saudi Arabia), 3/3/2010.

⁵⁶ *Al-Rai* newspaper, Kuwait, 4/3/2010.

⁵⁷ *Today’s Zaman*, 9/3/2010, <http://www.todayzaman.com/news-203771-erdogan-harsh-on-israel-heritage-move.html>; and *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 7/3/2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3858980,00.html>

⁵⁸ *Hürriyet Daily News*, 28/3/2010, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=israel-stand-on-united-jerusalem-madness-turkish-pm-2010-03-28>

⁵⁹ Site of Xinhua News Agency, 11/5/2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-05/11/c_13286314.htm

Despite all efforts that were made to reach a mutually acceptable settlement, Israel continued to stonewall Turkish demands for an apology and an end to the GS blockade, though Israel expressed willingness to give compensation to the families of the nine Turkish victims killed during the Israeli raid.

The Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident became known as the Palmer Report. But the findings infuriated the Turkish side; the report, which was prepared by a majority biased towards Israel, mentioned that Israel committed "an excessive reaction to the situation" but the report did not demand Tel Aviv apologize as it described the Israeli maritime siege imposed on GS as being both "legitimate" and compliant with the "requirements of international law." However, the report stated that Israel "should offer payment for the benefit of the deceased and injured victims and their families." On 2/9/2011, a day after the publication of the Palmer Report in *The New York Times*,⁶⁰ Davutoğlu announced the Turkish Government has decided to take the following measures:⁶¹

- a. "Diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel will be downgraded to the Second Secretary level. All personnel starting with the Ambassador above the Second Secretary level will return to their countries on Wednesday [7/9/2011] at the latest."
- b. "Military agreements between Turkey and Israel have been suspended."
- c. "As a littoral state which has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey will take whatever measures it deems necessary in order to ensure the freedom of navigation in the Eastern Mediterranean," without giving any clarifications.
- d. "Turkey does not recognize the blockade imposed on GS by Israel."
- e. "We will extend all possible support to Turkish and foreign victims of Israel's attack in their initiatives to seek their rights before courts."

Davutoğlu stated that "neither the Israeli Government who ordered the attack against the Mavi Marmara ship, nor the ones that actually carried out the attack

⁶⁰ *The New York Times* newspaper, 1/9/2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/world/middleeast/02flotilla.html?_r=3&smid=tw-nytimes&seid=auto

⁶¹ Press Statement by H.E. Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Regarding Turkish-Israeli relations, site of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey, 2/9/2011, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/press-statement-by-h_e_-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey_-regarding-turkish-israeli-re.en.mfa

are above or immune from the law” vowing to hold them accountable. He stated: “Now, the Government of Israel must face the consequences of its unlawful acts, which it considers above the law and are in full disregard of the conscience of humanity.” He affirmed that “The time has come for it to pay a price for its actions. This price is, above all, deprivation of Turkey’s friendship.” Moreover, Davutoğlu noted that “Israel has wasted all the opportunities it was presented with” to repair relations with Turkey.⁶²

Erdoğan escalated the situation by declaring that “[t]rade ties, military ties, regarding defense industry ties” were completely suspended with Israel, referring to it as “a spoiled child.” Davutoğlu announced in mid-December 2011 that Turkey’s policy was to isolate Israel and force it to back down in the region.⁶³

While Hamas welcomed the Turkish measures, it considered the move a natural reaction to the Israeli crime against the Freedom Flotilla, and to Israel’s refusal to take responsibility for the crime or lift the siege of GS. Hamas also declared its condemnation of the Palmer Report, which the movement described as “unjust” and lacking balance.⁶⁴

Given Turkish persistence, and in view of the changes in the region, Israel was obliged to apologize to Turkey on 22/3/2013 for the assault the Mavi Marmara. Erdoğan accepted Netanyahu’s apology. In a phone call Netanyahu claimed that “the tragic consequences of the Mavi Marmara flotilla were unintentional, and Israel regrets any injury or loss of life,” and also “agreed to complete an agreement to provide compensation to the families of the victims,” and added that “Israel had removed a number of restrictions upon the movement of citizens and goods in all the Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip.” Erdoğan said that his country would await concrete actions from Israel and would take practical steps during this stage. Netanyahu declared that the unravelling situation in Syria, and fears of

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ AlJazeera, 6/9/2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/2011969483323665.html> (in English); and *Milliyet*, 15/12/2011.

⁶⁴ AlJazeera, 2/9/2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/09/2011927226423902.html> (in English).

Al-Qaeda-affiliated militant groups resorting to the use of chemical weapons were the catalysts for such an apology in addition to the normalization of Israeli-Turkish relations.⁶⁵

Up to the end of 2013, the general Turkish stance was dissatisfaction with the Israeli failure to fulfil its commitments. Turkish President Abdullah Gül clarified in an interview with Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 6/10/2013 that “Israel apologized too late [and] some of our expectations were not yet met.” A senior diplomatic advisor in Ankara told the same newspaper that “even though Israel agreed to pay, an agreement still has not been reached regarding how the payment will be implemented.” It is noteworthy that another condition for the normalization of relations was not fulfilled, i.e., the removal of the Israeli blockade on GS. Hence, a breakthrough is not expected in the near future.⁶⁶

Despite all this, relations between Turkey and Israel were not severed. The relationship with Hamas as a resistance movement, meanwhile, did not go beyond Turkish calculations related to what was tolerable to the US and Western powers, or its position in NATO and its efforts to join the EU. For example, there was a decision by the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (*İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı—IHH*), headed by Fehmi Bülent Yıldırım, not to participate with the Turkish Mavi Marmara (Freedom Flotilla), nor any Turkish ship again, in future expeditions of the Freedom Flotilla, whose organizers were preparing for a second campaign to break the GS siege. The decision was made amid significant governmental pressure on the Turkish organizations that were participating. Erdoğan seems to have complied with a US desire to prevent the Marmara from participating in the Freedom Flotilla 2.

As for the evolution of the Turkish relationship with Hamas, Turkish officials acted as mediators in order to release the Israeli soldier captured by Hamas. This fact came to light when Shimon Peres thanked Turkey for its role in securing the prisoner swap deal, in addition to France and Germany, as the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* reported. The newspaper *Hürriyet* corroborated this, after reporting in detail about the Turkish role in securing Shalit’s release. Following the failure

⁶⁵ *Haaretz*, 22/3/2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/netanyahu-phones-erdogan-to-apologize-for-deaths-of-turkish-citizens-on-gaza-flotilla.premium-1.511394>; and Aljazeera.net, 23/3/2013. (in Arabic)

⁶⁶ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 6/10/2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4437193,00.html>

of its assault on GS, Israel asked Turkey to mediate. Though relations between the two countries were in bad shape, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu spoke about the issue with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who gave his firm approval, because he considered the issue humanitarian and unrelated to Turkish relations with Israel. Turkish intelligence thus contacted the Mossad and Egyptian intelligence, and the meetings led to substantial progress on this issue.⁶⁷ Even Turkey's hosting of a number of deported prisoners released by Israel as part of the deal was, for the Turks, inseparable from their desire to see "comprehensive peace in the region," and their efforts to encourage Hamas to adopt "the democratic choice." A senior Turkish official explained Turkey's hosting of those deportees to *Milliyet*, saying that it would create a new climate in the Middle East and would de-escalate the tensions. After the exchange, he claimed that calmer positions on the Israeli-Palestinian front would be seen, which would create a new dynamic for the peace process. He added that it was for this reason that Turkey became involved in the process, hoping to achieve Palestinian reconciliation, which would reassure Mahmud 'Abbas, and bring GS and WB closer together.

7. Economic Relations Between Turkey and Israel

It is of note that the Turkish government under the leadership of the AKP was pragmatic concerning its commercial ties with Israel. These ties were not affected much by Turkey's inclination to improve relations with the Arab and Muslim world, support the Palestinian issue, and develop relations with Hamas. Economic ties did not suffer much either because of the major political crisis in the wake of the Israeli raid on Turkish vessel Mavi Marmara on 31/5/2010. In general, the Turkish government managed its trade relations with Israel to a large degree, in isolation from its political positions and measures. This apparent contradiction between tension in the political relationship and improved trade relations could be attributed in part to a network of mutual interests. The AKP government could not impose its influence and control over these networks in a secular and economically open environment, while trying to adhere to the EU requirements for trade relations. Furthermore, some forms of the relationship take into account the Turkish army's need for Israeli military equipment and technology.

⁶⁷ Muhammad Nouredine, "What Role Did Turkey Play in the Prisoner Swap Deal?," *Assafir*, 15/10/2011. (in Arabic)

According to official Israeli data, the trade volume between Turkey and Israel doubled from about \$1,197 million in 2002 to about \$4,858 million in 2013, an increase of 305.9%. In the period 2002–2013, Turkish imports from Israel grew from \$383 million to about \$2,504 million, an increase of 553.5%, while Turkish exports to Israel doubled from about \$814 million to about \$2,354 million, an increase of 189.3%. Statistics do not show a significant change in the year during which the Israeli attack took place on the Turkish vessel (2010) or in the following year. However, there was a 13% drop in trade in 2012, though it quickly recovered in 2013, when trade volume grew by 38.6% compared to 2012 and 20.6% compared to 2011.

Table (1): Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Israeli Statistics for Selected Years (\$millions)⁶⁸

Year	2000	2002	2006	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Israeli Exports	434.4	383.1	821.2	1,086	1,310.7	1,855.7	1,421.4	2,503.5
Israeli Imports	586.5	813.7	1,272.7	1,387.7	1,800.1	2,171.1	2,082.7	2,354.1
Trade Volume	1,020.9	1,196.8	2,093.9	2,473.7	3,110.8	4,026.8	3,504.1	4,857.6

Meanwhile, official Turkish data gives bigger indications on the volume of trade, showing trade between Turkey and Israel doubling from around \$1,406 million in 2002 to about \$5,068 million in 2013, an increase of 260.5%. Between 2002 and 2013, Turkish imports from Israel grew from \$545 million to about \$2,418 million, an increase of 344.1%. Meanwhile, Turkish exports to Israel grew from about \$861 million to about \$2,650 million, an increase of 207.6%. The data does not show a significant change in the year during which the Israeli attack took place on the Turkish vessel (2010) or in the following year; However, there is a drop in trade by 9.12% in 2012, though trade levels quickly recovered in 2013, when the trade volume increased by 25.4% from 2012, and by 13.9% compared to 2011.

⁶⁸ See Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), http://www1.cbs.gov.il/shnaton55/st16_05x.pdf 66
http://www.cbs.gov.il/archive/201002/yarhon/h5_e.htm
www1.cbs.gov.il/publications13/yarhon0213/pdf/h8.pdf
<http://www1.cbs.gov.il/publications14/yarhon0214/pdf/h8.pdf>

Table (2): Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish Statistics for Selected Years (\$millions)⁶⁹

Year	2000	2002	2006	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Turkish Exports	650.1	861.4	1,529.2	1,522.4	2,080.1	2,391.1	2,329.5	2,649.7
Turkish Imports	505.5	544.5	782.1	1,074.7	1,359.6	2,057.3	1,710.4	2,418
Trade Volume	1,155.6	1,405.9	2,311.3	2,597.1	3,439.7	4,448.4	4,039.9	5,067.7

Third: Hamas and Iran

Hamás’s relations with Iran differ markedly from its relations with Turkey on many levels: history, the extent of their development, and the shared goals between the two sides. To be sure, Iran considers itself not only a supporter of the Palestinian people from a humanitarian point of view, but also rejects Israel’s very existence, considering it an illegitimate entity that must be removed. Iran declares explicitly that it supports resistance movements in Palestine, and receives the leaders of Palestinian political parties publicly, as well as resistance leaders of the PIJ and Hamas, and other Palestinian factions.

Iran has held many international conferences hosting hundreds of dignitaries entitled to support the *Intifadah* or the resistance in Palestine against the Israeli occupation, including a conference held on 2–3/10/2011, which hundreds of Palestinian and Arab figures attended. Iran believes that supporting the Palestinian people and resistance is a part of its core religious principles and its revolutionary legitimacy, as well as its foreign policy of “supporting all the oppressed peoples around the world.”

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Chapter 10, under the heading of foreign policy, Article 154, states, “The Islamic Republic of Iran... while scrupulously refraining from all forms of interference in the internal affairs

⁶⁹ See Foreign Trade by Countries, Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046

of other nations... supports the just struggles of the *mustad'afun* [oppressed] against the *mustakbirun* [oppressors] in every corner of the globe."⁷⁰

Since the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the new republic has shown a clear position on the Palestinian issue. The new religious leadership closed down the Israeli embassy in the capital Tehran and replaced it with the "Embassy of Palestine."

Hamas's relations with Iran did not go beyond the goals of the Islamic resistance movement, most notable its interest in reaching out to the Islamic sphere in its official and popular dimensions, and establishing direct relations with them.⁷¹ But Hamas's relationship with Iran seems at the same time the most prominent among its relations with Muslim countries, and the most sensitive and controversial, due to Iran's unstable and often tense relations with several Arab countries, such as the KSA and other Gulf States, which Hamas is keen on maintaining friendly relations with. It is noted that Hamas is sometimes accused of subservience to Iran, but not to any other Islamic or Arab state.

1. Developments in the Relationship Between Hamas and Iran

The Iraq-Iran war soon became the main concern of the new Islamic regime in Tehran. For years, this war became a priority that took precedence over other issues in the Middle East, including the Palestinian issue. But the outbreak of the *Intifadah* in 1987, one year before the cessation of the Iraq-Iran war in 1988, marked the beginning of a new trend in Iranian-Palestinian relations, especially with Hamas, which would become the one of the most prominent Palestinian factions in the early nineties.

This was the stage during which Iranian relations with Hamas grew dramatically, on the basis of rejection of negotiations and a peace settlement with Israel by both parties. Tehran also held a conference to support the "revolution of the Palestinian people" on 22/10/1991, a few days before the Madrid Peace Conference, a clear signal of Iran's position. The Tehran conference brought together Palestinian factions opposed to the peace process, in addition to Palestinian and Arab figures and parties that support resistance and reject the Madrid Peace Conference. The

⁷⁰ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, site of Foundation for Iranian Studies, <http://fis-iran.org/en/resources/legaldoc/constitutionislamic>

⁷¹ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Al-Fikr wa al-Mumarah al-Siyasiyyah*, p. 196.

Madrid Peace Conference was held at the beginning of November 1991 under the direct auspices of the US, following the “liberation” of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, in which all the Arab countries and representatives of the PLO participated.

The appointment of a representative of Hamas in Iran in October 1990 marked the beginning of the official relationship between the two sides. This was followed by opening an official office for Hamas in the Iranian capital in February 1992, two months after the Madrid Peace Conference was held. It was Iran’s way of saying that it recognized Hamas’s central role in the Palestinian opposition.⁷²

In line with the principle of seeking balance in its relations with the Arab and Islamic parties, Hamas sees Iran, in the words of the Hamas representative in Tehran, as “a strategic ally... because the convergence in the strategic vision in its Islamic dimension is what makes Iran a strategic ally.”⁷³ Because the relationship Hamas maintains with Iran is clear and public, based on mobilizing the greatest possible amount of support for the Palestinian issue as an Islamic issue, Hamas has made it clear to Iran that “the relationship is based on mutual respect, solidarity in positions, political views, and strategic views regarding the [peace] settlement, without any dictates.”⁷⁴ However, this “strategic relationship” with Tehran must not prejudice the balance of relations that Hamas maintains with Arab parties, which do not all have good relations with Tehran, because this would force Hamas to pay a heavy price in its Arab relations, particularly with the Gulf countries. This is a political price first and foremost, and also a popular price, because of the sectarian sensitivities that cannot be ignored in the Gulf region toward Iran. Nevertheless, Hamas did not move away from Iran, but engaged Tehran to a large extent, because it was not logical for Hamas not to appreciate Iran’s strong position and opposition to the peace process,⁷⁵ which Hamas also opposes.

Head of Hamas’s Political Bureau Khalid Mish‘al, after years of good relations between his movement and Iran, stressed the independence of Palestinian decision. He said, “Hamas’s decision stems from the Palestinian reality and is not subservient

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

to anyone. This is a fact known to everyone, as reality and practice attest.” Mish‘al added, “But Hamas, as an integral part of its nation, takes into account the overall situation in Arab and Muslim world, away from dependency and subservience, and conflict and tension.” Mish‘al also remarked, “Hamas succeeded in establishing a balanced equation in its Arab and Islamic relations, and in making the Palestinian issue and the confrontation with the Zionist project an element that brings together the nation.” While answering another question, Mish‘al rejected considering his movement’s program part of the Syrian or Iranian agenda, saying, “Our good relationship with Syria and Iran does not mean we are part of their program. But rather, this relationship is part of the effort for strengthening the Arab and Muslim depth of the Palestinian issue.”

Mish‘al refused implementing any Syrian or Iranian scenario to thwart peace or topple the government of Shimon Peres. He said, “Hamas would never go down this path, nor would it accept such assumptions about it. [Hamas] bases its stances on pure Palestinian considerations, and its policies stem from the interests and rights of our people.” Mish‘al denies the hypothesis of “paying a price” in return for a “safe haven,” saying, “If we did this, then we would have had different stances that the ones you see. Our presence in this or that Arab country is part of what the nation owes us, and also part of the reality of Palestinian Diaspora.”⁷⁶

Even after the Mecca Agreement between Hamas and the PA, brokered by KSA, Mish‘al stressed this independence, saying, “Our relationship with KSA is not at the expense of Iran, and that our relationship with Syria is not at the expense of Egypt.”⁷⁷ Mish‘al repeated this again when reconciliation between Hamas and the PA, brokered by Egypt, faltered, because of conditions, threats, or trials, as Prime Minister Isma‘il Haniyyah of Hamas said. Mish‘al remarked, in response to a question about Hamas’s bias to Iranian policy in the region in return for Tehran’s political and material support for the movement, said, “Hamas, despite its close relationship with Iran, is not in the pocket of Iran as it is not in the pocket of Syria. Our relationship with everyone is based on mutual respect. We are keen on their balance and on Arab interests.” Mish‘al added, “We have knocked on the doors of

⁷⁶ Interview with Khalid Mish‘al, *Al-Hayat*, 9/12/2003.

⁷⁷ *Alray Alaam* newspaper, Kuwait, 25/2/2007.

all our brothers out of need for our Arab depth... but what can we do if some do not respond... love cannot be one sided.”⁷⁸

Various Iranian stances in support of Hamas contributed directly to the rapprochement between the two parties.⁷⁹ Iran worked to prevent the encirclement of Hamas after its victory in the legislative elections, especially as the rival party (PA) had broad Arab and international support. Hamas came under a cruel financial and political blockade from the same Arab and international actors after its 2006 PLC elections victory, and then its takeover of GS in 2007. Iran was accused of encouraging Hamas to carry out its “coup,” as Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait claimed.⁸⁰

At the Israeli and international (and even Arab) levels, Hamas was a permanent target of harassment or even elimination. For this reason, Hamas needed Iranian support at all levels. For example, in late 2006 the Palestinian Cabinet announced that the visit by Prime Minister Isma‘il Haniyyah to Iran yielded \$250 million in aid to the Palestinian people.⁸¹

During reconciliation talks with Fatah and the PA, Hamas came under intense Arab pressure. Only Iran and Syria supported Hamas, while Qatar, Yemen, and

⁷⁸ *Assafir*, 27/9/2008.

⁷⁹ L'Iran et le Hamas: des relations solides qui se renforcent, site of JSS News, 27/1/2010, <http://jssnews.com/2010/01/27/liran-et-le-hamas-des-relations-solides-qui-se-renforcent>

⁸⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 21/6/2007.

⁸¹ Site of Al-Arab al-Yawm, 12/12/2006. According to the same source, the break down of the \$250 million aid package was as follows: Iran provided financial support in order to break the siege an amount of money estimated at \$100 million for the year 2007 in support of the Palestinian people. It pledged to cover the salaries of the employees of the Ministries of Social Affairs, Labor and Detainees for six months to come, and the payment of entitlements to prisoners and their families for six months to come, with the total amount offered to the three ministries and the prisoners was in the vicinity of \$45 million. The Palestinian Cabinet also said that the aid package included providing assistance to unemployed Palestinian workers, who number 100 thousand to the tune of \$100 per worker per month for a period of six months, with a total of up to \$60 million. It would also provide urgent assistance to fishermen in GS, who number three thousand with \$100 per fisherman for a period of six months, a total of up to \$1.8 million. The Cabinet's statement said that the Iranian aid package covered the costs of building the Cultural Palace and National Library to the tune of \$15 million, and the costs of rebuilding one thousand houses to the tune of \$10 thousand per house, reaching a total of \$20 million. It would cover the difference in buying Palestinian olive oil with a sum of \$5 million, and the cost of 300 cars for the Palestinian government with a sum of \$3 million. Thus, the visit provided total Iranian aid of \$250 million.

Sudan sympathized with it, and understood its positions, in varying degrees. This lasted until the situation changed after the Egyptian “revolution,” and reconciliation was achieved without any Egyptian pressure or conditions imposed on Hamas as would have been the case under the former Mubarak regime.

Hamas’s relations with Iran caused concerns between Palestinian and Arab actors, related essentially to the differences between the latter with Hamas and Iran over the peace process. But Hamas would always stress its independence from Iran. For example, Hamas’s spokesperson in GS, Sami Abu Zuhri asked, “Why is there focus only on our good relations with Syria and Iran? We also have relations with Qatar, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. Is it because the rest of the countries have good relations with the United States? What is important for us is to defend the Palestinian people.”⁸² For his part, Musa Abu Marzuq, after affirming Hamas’s good relations with all parties, distinguishes between the attitudes of various countries vis-à-vis the resistance saying, “When a country is more positive toward us this does not mean that we favor it...”⁸³

Hamas denies it is subservient to any of the countries that back it, in order to balance its relations with Arab and Muslim countries, and to mobilize support and defend the Palestinian people. Whereas, the Iranian leaders do not hide their relationship with Hamas, and regularly stress their support for this movement in particular, and the Palestinian issue and the choice of resistance against the Israeli occupation in general. For this reason, the chairman of the Iranian Shura Council denies US and Western accusations that Iran supports Hizbullah secretly, and says, “We are proud of supporting Hizbullah and Hamas as well. It is the United States that must answer the question: Why is it hostile to Hamas and Hizbullah?”⁸⁴

Iranian leaders often reiterate their support for Hamas as a resistance movement against the occupation. Regarding the GS siege, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, for example, called on Muslim countries to break the blockade, saying, “Resistance is the only option to save the Palestinian people” and called on the Palestinians to safeguard their unity and rally around their elected government, meaning the government of Hamas.⁸⁵

⁸² *Financial Times* newspaper, 1/2/2006.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Almustaqbal*, 5/1/2011.

⁸⁵ *Al-Khaleej*, 9/2/2008

During a meeting in Tehran with the Head of the Hamas Political Bureau, Khaled Mish'al, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili said that the resistance and the comprehensive conscious steadfastness of the Palestinian people is worthy of respect. He added that the secret of Hamas's success was that it has fought in earnest for the rights of the Palestinian people. The Supreme Leader, on the same occasion, remarked that Israel was not able to crush the Palestinian people, calling for continued resistance. Khamenei described the positions taken by the leadership of Hamas and Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah as courageous, and a cause for hope, joy, and reassurance. He condemned the inhumane blockade imposed on GS and the daily killings of children. In a remarkable statement, Khamenei then declared direct support for Hamas, saying that Iran stood on its side in GS. This served as a response to the other Arab and non-Arab forces besieging Hamas, undermining its rule in GS.

In his sermon for Eid al-Fitr on 2/10/2008, after stressing that the Israelis were on their way to collapse, Khamenei said, "Iran will stand by the Hamas government in Gaza," and calling Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah as "mujahid." Khamenei called for concerted efforts and greater solidarity to support the Palestinian people.⁸⁶ During a meeting with Khalid Mish'al, in Tehran, Khamenei had called for "developing a plan that enables all Muslims to offer annual financial assistance to the Palestinians."

The then Secretary-General of the Supreme National Security Council in Iran, Ali Larijani, after a meeting with Mish'al as well, said, "Hamas is popular and authentic. It has long sought to guarantee the rights of the oppressed Palestinian people." Larijani then added that Iran would help the Hamas government financially, so it can cope with US pressures. He then continued, "We hope that the new Palestinian government will overcome its current problems with the help of Muslim countries, including Iran."⁸⁷

President Mahmud Ahmadinejad reiterated this clearly by saying that his country would continue to support the Islamic resistance movement Hamas "until Israel collapses," and that Iran considers its support to the Palestinians a national and religious duty, and would stand with the Palestinians until a great victory, the

⁸⁶ *Asharq Alawsat*, 2/10/2008.

⁸⁷ *Assafir*, 23/2/2006.

“collapse of the Zionist regime,” is achieved. The Israeli paper *Maariv* pointed out that the Republic of Iran provided, before Hamas’s takeover of GS, important assistance to Hamas including funds and weapons, sending military experts and Hizbullah members into GS. The paper added that the most important item in Iranian aid is training given to hundreds of Hamas members on Iranian territory. Some of them returned to GS afterwards. Ali Larijani admitted his country’s support for Hamas, denying at the same time providing them with weapons.⁸⁸

Iran also confirmed Hamas’s independence, and denied the movement was subservient to it. Iran’s Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Muhammad Ali Hosseini, in response to comments by King Abdullah II, in which he said that the Hamas leaders were at Iran’s beck and call, said:

Hamas’ decisions are not subject to the orders of any state. It is unfortunate that some Arab countries in the region are sometimes affected by the policies of the US and Israel, but turn a blind eye to the interests of the Palestinian people. This is the kind of orientation is a kind of blaming others and does not match with the facts on the Palestinian arena.⁸⁹

The website OnIslam.net, on 26/12/2007, summed up the reasons that make the claim that Hamas was subservient to Iran illogical. These include:⁹⁰

First: Hamas has close ties with various Arab states, in a way that is generally at odds with Iranian foreign policy. This applies to its ties to Egypt, the Gulf countries, Yemen, and Iraq.

Second: The media affiliated to Hamas (Al-Aqsa TV and the Palestinian Information Center and many other outlets) adopts policy that is completely different from the policies, attitudes, and analyses of the Iranian media regarding the issue of Iraq and Afghanistan, and resistance operations in the two countries.

Third: The declaration of the founding of Hamas in 1987 did not carry any references to the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a matter of fact, major Hamas figures like Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Rantisi, Isma‘il Abu Shanab, Ibrahim

⁸⁸ *Al-Akhbar*, 23/6/2007.

⁸⁹ *Al-Watan*, Abha, 13/2/2008.

⁹⁰ Jihad al-Sa’di, “Hamis and Iran... Differences and Motives for the Relationship,” OnIslam, 26/12/2007, <http://www.onislam.net/arabic/islamyoon/observatory/103399-2007-12-26%2015-53-39.html> (in Arabic)

Maqadmah, and Salah Shehadeh, who founded the movement in Palestine, did not meet any Iranian officials during their lives.

Forth: Hamas is an integral branch of the Sunni MB movement, whose founding predates the Iranian revolution in 1979 by more than half a century. Outside of Palestine, countries such as Kuwait, the UAE, and Jordan were the home of current members of Hamas's political bureau, and none of them were influenced in their formative years by Iran or their relations to the Islamic Republic.

Iran's strategy in support of Hamas and resistance did not change throughout the various attacks that Hamas was subjected to. After the war on GS, for example, Iran Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki declared that the Israeli invasion of GS was a strategic mistake, and that Israel could never destroy Hamas.⁹¹

After the war ended, and to confront international schemes that would impose a blockade on GS and prevent Hamas from resupplying, Iran was prompted to defend the "natural right of those fighting colonialists to obtain arms."⁹² Tehran also held an international conference to support GS, during which Supreme Leader 'Ali Khamenei reiterated that steadfastness and resistance are the only way to save Palestine. Khamenei stated that Hamas's resistance was the "most important bright spot in the last one hundred years of Palestine's history."⁹³

Iran believed that relations with Hamas and other Islamic forces were the beginning of a new phase, which Iran dubbed "the Islamic Middle East." Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei criticized some Arab governments, which he did not name, for having failed the Palestinians, and for emphasizing the Arab identity of the Palestinian issue but without doing anything practical to support the Palestinians during the Israeli war on GS.⁹⁴

On another level, Israel accused Iran of smuggling weapons into GS and supplying Hamas with strategic rockets. Israel linked the relationship between Hamas and Iran to the Iranian nuclear program, claiming that Iran could instruct Hamas to launch rockets at Israel to protect this program. For instance, the Israeli Army

⁹¹ *Al-Khaleej*, 18/1/2009.

⁹² *Assafir*, 22/1/2009.

⁹³ *Arab News* newspaper, 5/3/2009, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/51199>

⁹⁴ Interview with Khamenei before The Fifth International Conference to Support the Palestinian *Intifadah*, 3/10/2011.

Radio quoted Israeli military sources as saying that Iran had provided the Palestinian factions in GS with long-range missiles capable of hitting strategic targets inside Israel, including Tel Aviv and its suburbs. The sources pointed out that Iranian missiles like Fajr and Fateh-110 (300 km range), had reached the parties allied to Iran in the region, and were capable of carrying warheads weighing 500 kg. The military sources warned that Hizbullah could launch pre-emptive attacks accompanied by intense attacks from GS, claiming that the main reason for any future war involving Iran's allies Syria, Hizbullah, and GS would be to respond to attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities.⁹⁵

In the same context of incitement on the back of the relationship between Hamas and Iran, the Israeli paper *Haaretz* reported that Hamas succeeded in smuggling anti-aircraft missiles into GS, and that Iran and Syria were the suppliers. The newspaper said that the assessment in Israel was that SA-7 Grail Surface to Air anti-aircraft missiles known as Strela-2 were now in the possession of Hamas and the PIJ in GS. The newspaper pointed out that this type of missile was not advanced, but that the Palestinian factions possession of hundreds of units would affect the flight of Israeli warplanes over GS. The newspaper also said that in the event security conditions deteriorated in GS, the Palestinian factions could fire these missiles at Israeli warplanes.

Israeli media reported that experts from both Iran and Syria arrived at GS to improve various military capabilities of resistance factions there, a claim denied by Nafez 'Azzam, member of the political bureau of PIJ, as reported by Sama News Agency. *Haaretz* also reported that members of Hamas left GS, via the Sinai tunnels, to attend training camps in Syria and Iran, with foreign experts also entering GS. It said that the Israeli army believes that Hamas is still trying to rearm and restore its military capabilities, damaged in operation Cast Lead, and is therefore not interested in provoking too harsh an Israeli response.⁹⁶

Iran encouraged reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, and did not object to the Egyptian role in this process, both before and after the ouster of the Egyptian regime, when this reconciliation was accomplished. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, in the summer of 2009, confirmed the support his country

⁹⁵ *Asharq Alawsat*, 20/4/2010.

⁹⁶ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2012), pp. 209-210.

to the unity of Palestinian factions.⁹⁷ The then Head of Iranian Shura Council, Ali Larijani, repeated the same position on 20/12/2009, declaring his support for Egypt's efforts to achieve reconciliation.⁹⁸

When it was announced that a reconciliation deal had been reached after the fall of Hosni Mubarak, Iran restated its support for this reconciliation. The day after the agreement was signed, the Iranian foreign minister, Ali Akbar Salehi, said it was a positive step towards achieving the historic goals of the Palestinian people, and expressed hope that the agreement would lay down "the bases of major victories against the Israeli occupier." Salehi praised Egyptian mediation efforts.⁹⁹

Iran also supported the prisoner swap deal between Hamas and Israel in October 2011, and congratulated the Palestinian people for this achievement. Isma'il Haniyyah telephoned Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and explained to him the details of the prisoner exchange deal between Hamas and Israel.

President Ahmadinejad and Isma'il Haniyyah agreed that patience and resilience remained key elements to defeat Israel and the oppressors, and bring victory for the Palestinian people and other free peoples calling for justice in the world. Ahmadinejad said that the Islamic Republic of Iran stands always on the side of the oppressed Palestinian people and the resistance, and will defend the rights of this free and proud people... There is no doubt that this issue is a major achievement for the Palestinian people and all Muslims and lovers of justice and freedom in the world, and that independent-minded peoples are pleased with this achievement. For his part, Isma'il Haniyyah said that Iran had supported and continued to support the Palestinian people, and is a partner in its victories.¹⁰⁰ The spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Ramin Mehmanparast, congratulated the Palestinian people on the release of Palestinian prisoners held by the Israel, saying "We hope one day all the land of Palestine will return to its rightful owners."¹⁰¹

In February 2012, Isma'il Haniyyah visited Iran for talks. Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, during his meeting with Haniyyah, stressed that the issue of

⁹⁷ Mehr News Agency, 12/7/2009, <http://www.mehrnews.com/> (in Arabic)

⁹⁸ *Al-Arab*, 21/12/2009.

⁹⁹ *Al-Masry al-Youm* newspaper, Cairo, 29/4/2011.

¹⁰⁰ Site of Al-Alam TV, 17/10/2011, <http://www.alalam.ir/news/769484> (in Arabic)

¹⁰¹ *Al-Hayat*, 19/10/2011.

Palestine is an Islamic cause and a central cause for Iran, saying, “We will remain on the side of the Palestinian people and their valiant resistance. Iran is committed and sincere towards the Palestinian issue and will never fail it.”¹⁰²

In Tehran, Haniyyah said that there was no change in the “firm and honorable” position of Iran in support of the Palestinian resistance. In an exclusive interview with Al-Alam TV, Haniyyah said that Iran’s position on the Palestinian issue was “a strategic position,” and that Iran’s support for the resistance and the Palestinian people along with their steadfastness stemmed from Iran’s Islamic faith and commitment, as well as moral values and political vision. Haniyyah said that Iran’s support for the Palestinians was unconditional, and welcomed by his government and Hamas, just like the latter would welcome it from any other party under the same conditions.

Haniyyah refused to accept the view of some that the Palestinian resistance is a bargaining chip in Iran’s hands, saying that the reality was that “the Palestinian people are under occupation, and Iran has responded to their call and was faithful to them, and did not ask once for something in return, as Iran saw it as a matter of Islamic commitment towards a Muslim people, Jerusalem, and *al-Aqsa*.” Haniyyah also stressed the unity of the Muslim nation, and that the main argument should not be within it, but between it and the Israeli occupation and US imperialism. Regarding the attempts to portray Iran as the main enemy of the Arabs in the region instead of Israel, Haniyyah said that Israel would remain the “main enemy of the nation,” and that the main conflict would continue to be with this “cancerous project.”¹⁰³

On the other hand, certain Palestinian and Arab parties saw Hamas’s relationship with Iran as a liability, because of what they perceive as “sectarian” or “pan-Persian” Iranian policies, and viewed Iran’s relationship with the resistance and Hamas as a cover for Iranian conduct and “ambitions” in the region. Meanwhile, Iranian parties believed that Iran was paying a heavy price for its support of the resistance, suffering American and Western economic sanctions, while Palestinian parties did not appreciate Iran’s support and some Arab parties scrambled to hold peace treaties with Israel. Thus, Hamas came under criticism, especially from the “moderate”

¹⁰² Fars News Agency, 12/2/2012, <http://arabic.farsnews.com> (in Arabic)

¹⁰³ Site of Al-Alam TV, 12/2/2012.

Arab regimes, Fatah and PLO leaderships, which accused Hamas of subservience to Iran and receiving cash from Tehran.

This relationship later came under criticism and accusations from the Iranian side itself, especially by reformist leaders. For they were at the peak of their conflict with the hardliners and the Supreme Leader over the results of the 2009 presidential elections, when the opposition accused the regime of rigging the results to secure a second term victory for Mahmud Ahmadinejad. The wife of opposition candidate Mir Hossein Musavi, in a television interview with *Al-Arabiya* on 11/6/2009, said that Ahmadinejad's foreign policy is the policy of chaos and that Mir Hossein Musavi would instead pursue a foreign policy of regional and world peace, based on the national interests of Iran. She added that Iranian interests would have priority.

We do not want to enter into costly alliances... Concerning Palestine, it is our slogan as well. But we will seek to be friends with the whole world and especially in the region and around us and our neighboring countries. We do not want to have tension and terrorism... we want to maintain our wealth for our people.

The slogans of Musavi supporters, when they took to the streets on the day of 'Ashura, were clearer than Musavi's wife's insinuations regarding "the priority of national interests." The protesters disavowed the burden of supporting resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, chanting: "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon... we are martyrs only for Iran."¹⁰⁴ Activists in Musavi's Green Movement launched an electronic attack on Hamas, and the funding sources that it relies on.¹⁰⁵

However, the general line in Iran and Hamas insisted on maintaining the relationship, based on the strategic convergence over hostility to Israel and the bid to liberate all of Palestine.

2. The Relationship After the Arab Revolutions

Some analysts thought that what happened in Syria in the context of the Arab revolutions drove a wedge between Hamas and Tehran, as Iran supported the regime in Syria, while Hamas was more reserved in expressing support for the

¹⁰⁴ *Alrai*, Amman, 19/9/2009.

¹⁰⁵ *Al-Hayat*, 10/9/2009. Also see article by Al-Faizi, A Photo Op with the Looters of the Iranian Nation's Money, site of *Al-Gharraf News*, 3/10/2011. (in Arabic)

regime, especially since the MB movement was part of the opposition in Syria. Rumors spread about estrangement between the two sides, with reports that Hamas wanted to move its offices from Syria to Qatar or Cairo. Some also assumed that Hamas would move its offices from Damascus to Turkey.¹⁰⁶

No changes appeared in Iran's policies vis-à-vis Hamas because of the position over the Syrian regime. Nor was there any indication that Hamas wanted to move from Damascus to another Arab capital or Turkey. The Head of the Media Department and prominent Hamas leader, Salah al-Bardawil told Aljazeera.net on 25/9/2011, "Differences over any event or issue does not spoil a relationship between two sides," pointing out that Iran was a country that opposed US hegemony and aggression on GS, which intersects with what Hamas wanted from all Arab and Muslims countries.

Al-Bardawil stressed that Iran had not backed down from its positions towards American hegemony and Zionism, saying that Hamas had not severed relations with Iran, and that the friendship had not turned sour as some had been claiming, further stressing Hamas's desire to maintain good relations with all sides. Al-Bardawil drew attention to the fact that Iran did not dictate terms to Hamas, and that Hamas does not accept any diktats, stressing that the joint interest was based on respecting one another's views and allowing room for divergent views over some issues.

Al-Bardawil said the sectarian concerns of some about the relationship were a non-starter, saying that those who stress this issue are affiliated to the US and Israel. He also said that Hamas was not a sectarian bridge for anyone, and was not interested in any sectarian conflicts.

On 25/9/2011, the Director of the Mustaqbal Research Center Ibrahim al-Madhoun also told Aljazeera.net that the relationship between Hamas and Iran was mutually complementary, that their political relationship is based on the achievement of the mutual short-term and strategic objectives. He added that the nature of the relationship remained too profound to be shaken or diverted by obstacles, and that he believed that Hamas and Iran were capable of overcoming historic and sectarian differences, and accumulated psychological complexes. However, he believed that the uncertainty at the time accounted for the many rumors.

¹⁰⁶ Rajab Abu Sariyeh, Aljazeera.net, 25/9/2011. (in Arabic)

Despite the lukewarm relationship between Hamas and Iran after the revolutions and changes in the Arab world, Hamas remained an important part of the so-called “Refusal Front,” which Tehran sees as the axis that opposes the US and Israel in the Middle East. Iran believes that support for Hamas is in line with its principles in supporting the resistance movements and the oppressed in the world. For Iran, supporting Hamas also rebuts accusations against it of pursuing sectarian policies. Whenever Hamas or resistance movements in Palestine were able to hold their ground and weaken Israel, this served as a strategic boost for Iran, which sees itself in a confrontation on the security, military, and psychological levels with Israel. This is especially so since Iran’s senior leaders have stressed the illegitimacy of Israel, Iran’s opposition to the peace process, and its non-recognition of peace treaties between the Palestinians and Israel.

But despite this convergence between the principles and interests of Hamas and Iran, Hamas remained committed to its Charter and shunning alignment to this or that Arab or Muslim side. While Hamas at times declared its support for Iran in any possible confrontation with Israel or even the US,¹⁰⁷ it did not voice any position against any Arab or Muslim country that had differences with Iran, such as KSA, Egypt, Turkey, or any Gulf country. Hamas did not commit itself to all Iranian positions or policies either. Regarding the Palestinian bid to join the UN as a member state, for example, Iran rejected the bid, considering it a betrayal of Palestinian rights.¹⁰⁸ The Supreme Leader also said it was “the end of the right of return and the Palestinians’ claim to the territory [occupied in] 1948.”¹⁰⁹ However, Khalid Mish‘al, during the same conference that brought him with the Iranian leadership in Tehran, said the bid was an “undeniable symbolic and moral victory.”¹¹⁰

Some even see that Hamas’s participation in the 2006 election was against Tehran’s wishes. Hamas’s positions in support of establishing a Palestinian state

¹⁰⁷ “The Islamic Republic defends the rights of the Palestinians and we defend the rights of Islamic Iran. We are in the same front against the enemies of Islam... Hamas would fight alongside Iran if America militarily attacks it,” said Khalid Mish‘al during a visit to Iran. See *The Daily Star*, 21/3/2007.

¹⁰⁸ *Assafir*, 24/9/2011.

¹⁰⁹ *Al-Akhabar*, 3/10/2011.

¹¹⁰ The Fifth International Conference to Support the Palestinian *Intifadah*, 2–3/10/2011.

within “the 1967 borders,” or a long-term truce with Israel, did not conform to Iran’s policies or its Palestine strategy, which does not encourage any negotiations, truce, or recognition.

Although the relationship between Hamas and its GS government and Iran cooled down, with a decline in financial and logistical support in 2012–2013 as a result of their differences, especially over Syria, the relationship continued even if was at a minimal level. Iran’s qualitative support for Hamas and resistance groups emerged clearly during the Israeli assault on GS in November 2012, when the Palestinian resistance reached a new milestone with its rockets hitting Tel Aviv and other areas deeper into Israel, and prevented the enemy from achieving its military and security objectives. The role of Iranian weapons was important in achieving this. Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said, “We do not conceal our support to Palestine... the Israeli entity is a cancerous tumor. We provide assistance to the Palestinian people including armament. In the 8-day war, the people of Gaza, with this assistance, were able to defend against and rout the Israeli entity.”¹¹¹

Relations chilled again after that, but, despite the differences that could no longer be concealed, Iranian and Hamas attitudes confirmed that there was no estrangement and that contacts between the two sides continued.¹¹²

In a confirmation of the decline in Hamas-Iran relations, Mahmud al-Zahhar, a prominent Hamas leader, said that the relations between the movement and Iran resumed again after a lull due to the latter’s position on Syria. Al-Zahhar then stressed, “Our relationship with Iran has not been severed, and we do not want to sever it with any of the Arab countries, even those that are fighting us.”¹¹³

To promote this mutual commitment to restore bilateral relations, a member of Hamas Political Bureau, Muhammad Nasr, visited Iran. Haniyyah’s advisor Yusuf Rizqa commented on the visit by saying that the issues that brought Hamas and Iran together are Jerusalem and liberation, both being shared objectives that are bigger than the points of contention. Rizqa added that there remained lots of common grounds with Iran, which was facing American and Israeli threats, just like Hamas.

¹¹¹ Sama News Agency, 13/2/2013.

¹¹² Mehr News Agency, 23/7/2013.

¹¹³ *Almustaqbal*, 10/12/2013.

Rizqa then pointed out, “Hammas did not meddle in Iran’s internal affairs, and even in the Syrian issues, Hammas did not intervene, but only voiced positions in support of the Syrian people’s right to be free.”¹¹⁴

Musa Abu Marzuq, member of Hammas’s political bureau, summarized the position on Syria and differences with Iran in an editorial in *Al-Quds al-Arabi* titled “Hammas’s Crisis and Its National Fundamentals.” He wrote:

The relationship with Iran was influenced by what happened in Syria. We tried to isolate positions on Syria from other issues, and maintain the relationship with Iran at its known level, but the relationship was affected. We are trying to restore what was broken, to serve our people and our cause.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

The OIC has not developed any special relations with Hammas or any other resistance movement. It has reflected the attitudes of the political regimes of its member states, and not the peoples of these states. Consequently, the OIC has generally backed the strategy of peace with Israel, denouncing Israeli policies that have obstructed negotiations with the Palestinians, and calling for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state in WB and GS. It acknowledged Hammas’s victory in the PLC elections, supported the inter-Palestinian dialogue, encouraging reconciliation between Fatah and Hammas, and it even tried to play a direct role in this effort, but to no avail.

As for the relationship between Hammas and Turkey, it is possible to say that four historic events on the Palestinian level have helped in the development of an effective Turkish role in Palestine, and opened up the prospect for the bi-lateral relations. These events were: the legislative elections in 2006 which was won by Hammas; and intra-Palestinian clashes in GS between Hammas and Fatah; the Israel assault on GS in late 2008 and early 2009 aimed at the elimination of Hammas; and the Israeli raid on the Turkish vessel Mavi Marmara on 31/5/2010. Turkey played roles in these three situations, in terms of the recognition of election results and

¹¹⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 10/10/2013.

¹¹⁵ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18/12/2013.

encouraging Hamas to “renounce violence,” in terms of mediation between Fatah and Hamas, or in terms of denouncing the Israeli aggression on GS. However, its options with the AKP remained under the “Arab Peace Initiative” ceiling, calling for a negotiated settlement, recognition and normalization with Israel if the latter agrees to withdraw to the 1967 borders.

In other words, the Turkish dispute with Israel over the issues mentioned above did not alter Turkey’s core attitudes drawn from those of NATO and the EU concerning Israel’s existence and the need to recognize it and negotiate with it for a peaceful settlement to the conflict. The Arab uprisings that broke out at the beginning of 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt, and moved to other countries in the Arab region, reinforced the Turkish role and its effectiveness but did not change Turkey’s Palestine strategy. It is difficult for Turkey to be part of the structure of Western policies in the region, and at the same time pursue a policy hostile to Israel. Therefore, it is not probable in the current circumstances that Turkish-Israeli relations could be severed. Turkey will therefore most probably continue its policy of “calculated support” for Hamas.

Iran continued to declare support for Hamas, a relationship that has lasted a quarter of a century. Iran continued to flatly reject negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis, and continued to stress its fixed positions on the legitimacy of resistance and the illegitimacy of Israel.

Contrary to the logic of other Muslim countries (including Turkey), Tehran stressed the demise of the “Zionist entity,” and its officials often expressed optimism about this imminent demise. Iran went as far as to question the legitimacy of the Palestinian negotiator, and condemned the policies of Judaization pursued by Israel, while renewing support for the resistance and stressing its confidence that this was the only way to eliminate Israel and achieve victory.

Hamas still needs support from Iran as a major Islamic power, as long as it continues to be a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation, and as long as the prospect for a peaceful settlement remains blocked with no light at the end of the tunnel. For this reason, Hamas will need to maintain ties not only with Iran, but also Turkey, and all Muslim and Arab countries, especially in the post-Arab uprisings phase, which remains rife with uncertainty. This does not permit any change in strategic choices in the foreseeable future.

Iran will maintain its close relationship with Hamas, as long as Iran remains committed to a strategy of confrontation with Israel and US. For Iran, Hamas is a resistance movement that fits into this strategy. Thus, Iran diverges in its strategic view of the relationship with Hamas and its support for it on many levels, from the orientations and policies of other Muslim countries such as Turkey or other member states of the OIC. It is expected that the relationship between Hamas and Iran will improve, if the chances of a political settlement in Syria improve, or if Israel launches any new aggression on the Palestinian people in GS.