

Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas): Performance Evaluation

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Abstract

The paper evaluates the performance of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) which is labeled by the US and other Western countries as a terrorist organization in the period after 2006, after she won the Palestinian legislative elections of 2006. Many parties including Palestinians, the US and Israel tried to remove Hamas from office and dismantle it as a military organization but failed. Hamas received support from some other parties such as Iran and Syria, and could survive the war waged by Israel on Gaza in 2008/2009, and the siege imposed. Hamas succeeded in ousting the Palestinian Authority from Gaza and impose her vision on the Arab Israeli conflict, but failed in meeting the expectations of the people as an authority running the daily life of the Palestinians in Gaza strip. Hamas proved to be professional fighters, but poor administrators. Along the lines of the Moslem Brothers, Hamas is ready to talk peace, but not ready to recognize Israel.

Hamas is the acronym of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement that vowed to resist the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The movement was established by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin of Gaza in 1987, and pledged to participate in the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) of that time in an effort to end the occupation. Although the movement is an offshoot of the Moslem Brothers organization, she has been labeled by the US, Israel and many European countries as a terrorist organization, and exposed to isolation and Arab-Israeli orchestrated efforts of elimination. The movement suffered so many blows, but could hold there and compete with Fatah, the Palestinian organization that signed peace accords with Israel.

Due to the victory achieved in the Palestinian legislative elections in 2006, Hamas could form a legislative majority supported Palestinian government. Hamas could harvest the majority of the seats in the legislative council, and marked a turning point in the recent history of the Palestinians that ended Fatah monopoly of power. That victory was stunning and astonishing for both the Palestinians and all the forces involved in seeking a peaceful solution for the century-long conflict. Israel, the US and some Arab and European countries expressed their dismay and worries about the negotiations process. From the very beginning, these parties together with Fatah started talking about the hardships awaiting the Palestinians and the regrets they are going to express due to their “un-intelligent” choice. The wheels of democracy stopped there, and the Western campaign to spread democracy started to dwindle.

Victory meant that Hamas had to face a great challenge aiming at its leadership and existence as a resistance movement. It was evident that internal and external forces were not only dismayed, but were thinking of reposing Fatah on the seat of leadership. This paper concentrates on this point, and tries to evaluate Hamas performance in facing the challenge, and in implementing her own program in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Toward fulfillment, the paper discusses briefly the following topics:

- 1- Anti-Hamas policies adopted by internal and external forces including the US;
- 2- Hamas early steps toward augmenting her administrative capabilities;
- 3- The security chaos, and Hamas involvement in internal fighting;
- 4- Facing the siege on Gaza, and the war of 2008/2009;
- 5- Seeking international recognition.

This is mainly a descriptive analytical paper of Hamas policies and approaches toward the major above indicated topics.

It attempts to evaluate the successes of Hamas and her disappointments in view of her charter and commitments made to the Palestinian people mainly in her political platform, and the pronouncements of her leaders. The paper doesn't make a clear distinction between Hamas as a movement and Hamas government because the government is one of the movement tools or part of the apparatus. Separation between both is impossible, and the independence of the government from the movement isn't likely. The government carries out Hamas policies, and isn't separate or distinct from the movement.

The paper tries to answer questions such as:

Has Hamas been up to the challenge?

Could Hamas prove to be different from Fatah and more convincing to the people?

Could Hamas reconcile between resistance and authority building?

Has Hamas got anywhere close to international recognition?

Is Hamas now a viable leader that can unite the Palestinians?

The hypothesis of this paper is that Hamas couldn't abide strictly by her charter and principles and hasn't been up to popular expectations, but could survive all international and internal pressures.

The War on Hamas

At the outset of Hamas elections victory, Fatah, Israel and Western and Arab forces suffered a shocking surprise. Or as Scott Wilson put it: "the election results stunned the US and Israel" (**Wilson, The Washington Post**). All of these forces were interested in having Hamas run for the elections on the hope that Fatah negotiations process would gain legitimacy. They thought that Hamas would win a considerable number of seats, but not a majority in the legislative council that would make Fatah political moves toward a final settlement with Israel look democratic; but the turnout was contrary to the expectations. All of these forces thought that all of what had been accomplished through the negotiations process might collapse, and decided to take steps that might rather lead to the collapse of Hamas. That was evident in Condoleezza Rice' statement on 26/1/2006, the day of Palestinian elections, US time, saying that Hamas remains a terrorist organization. (**Associated Press and News Agencies, Jan 13,2006**)

On the internal level

Fatah took the first precautionary step that would dismantle Hamas expected government from some of its authorities. The outdated Fatah dominated legislative council held an abnormal session on 13/Feb/2006, after the elections and before the inauguration of the new council, and decided to annex thousands of new Fatah governmental employees to the already employee inflated civil and security service, and appointed a secretary general for the council. Besides, it decided to strip the prime minister of some of his authorities in favor of the president of the authority such as the reign over the governmental mass media, and some security departments. (**The minutes of the Palestinian Legislature, Feb 13, 2006**)

The session itself was highly unethical, although legal, and contrary to internationally well-known standards of political behavior. It is well-known that the outgoing legislative council refrains from enacting or amending laws at the time of elections and afterwards, leaving the task to the new council. Many Human rights and democratic organizations commented on that including the Palestinian Center For Human Rights which said "*The legality of the session is not in question, as it was held in accordance with Basic Law and its amendments. However, the timing of the session contradicts with customary traditions in democratic systems. In addition, it contradicts with the basic philosophy of the legislative process, and the basics of the PLC's mandate and the electoral process.*" (**The Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Feb 16, 2006**) This courtesy was not only absent from the thinking of Fatah, but seemingly it was supported by forces supporting Fatah such as the US. The Dutch foreign minister, for instance commented on the outcome of the elections saying "*The Palestinian people have opted for this government, so they will have to bear the consequences.*" (**Nathan Brown, Policy Brief**) It might be very interesting to mention that the US put tremendous pressure on Arafat to concede some of his authorities to the US made Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbass, (**Anthony Billingsley, Leaks cast Cloud on Future of PA**) the same authorities that were taken away from the expected Hamas prime minister. This shed so much doubt on the seriousness of the Western countries to adhere with democratic principles.

The Western countries stopped financing the Palestinian Authority so the new Hamas government wouldn't be able to pay the salaries. It became evident that principles are sacrificed for expedience.

Fatah also started to escalate the already existing chaos in the West Bank and Gaza in an endeavor to confuse Hamas and her government. Yasser Arafat and his sub-ordinates thought that they could have a firm grip on the Palestinians in the occupied territories of 1967 through several means among of which is the spread of fright in the Palestinian street through armed Fatah gangsters. **(Bret Stephens, the Wall street Journal)** These gangsters used to shoot haphazardly in the streets of Palestinian cities, cripple some opposition figures, extort people and terrorize them. The writer of this paper was targeted by the gangsters of the Palestinian intelligence and hit by four bullets in 1995. This process of silencing people was part of Arafat's policy in Lebanon, and he thought that it might be helpful in implementing his accords with Israel.

Fatah supported gangsters started intensifying their attacks on ordinary unarmed people, governmental institutions including the buildings of the legislative council and the prime ministry, and Hamas members particularly in Gaza. They also started conducting strikes because of the unpaid salaries, and a wave of incitement against Hamas. **(Israel News, Oct 22, 2006)** They were aiming at paralyzing Hamas government through instability and daily street problems on the hope that the Palestinians would revolt against Hamas and call for reinstalling Fatah in power.

Security Coordination

All Palestinian resistance movements were classified by Oslo Accords as terrorists, not by name but by principle. Neither in Oslo nor in Taba Accords, Palestinian resistance movements were mentioned, but it is stated in both that the Palestinian Authority (PA) must fight terrorism and coordinate with Israel on security matters. Yasser Arafat pledged in his letter to Rabin, the then Israeli Prime Minister, that he would fight Palestinian terrorism, **(Arafat's Letter, Sep 9, 1993)** and it was stated clearly in Taba accords that the PA wouldn't tolerate terrorism, and would take all possible measures to curb it. **(Taba Interim Agreement, articles X-XVI)**

Hamas and Jihad Islami (Islamic Jihad Organization) had to suffer most from these security pledges and the peace accords requirements. The PA started arresting members of these two organizations, and holding them for long imprisonments that extended up to three years without trials. **(Patrick Cockburn, the Independent, Elizabeth Freed, Palestinian Authority political Arrests)** The PA used to arrest Fatah members who didn't abide by the tenets of the accords, and could assimilate most of these people in her security service. **(David Bedein, Will US, Canadian and EU Trained Palestinian Turn on Israel)**

What was stunning for the Palestinians in general is the open and overt coordination between the Israeli security service and the Palestinian security whose members were supposed to liberate Palestine and restore the Palestinian national rights. Those who were supposed to be comrade fighters became, all of a sudden, the Israeli observed jail guards. That escalated a spirit of animosity and bitterness, which contributed gravely in damaging the social and ethical fabrics of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza.

On the Israeli level

Immediately after the announcement of the elections results, Ehud Olmert, the then Israeli premier, said "Israel will not negotiate with a terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel." **(News Bulletin, BBC)** To reach the objective of bringing Hamas to a collapse or surrender, the Israelis took the following major steps:

- a- Arresting Hamas members of the legislative council and the government particularly those in the West bank and restricting their movements. Israel arrested around sixty four of these MPs and cabinet members in an effort to bring the legislature to a halt, and abuse the legal efforts of Hamas that would lead to the implementation of her agenda. **(Reported By News Agencies such as France Press, June 2006)** Israel and the other forces that try to promote democracy just disregarded all democratic values and principles. Arrests of this sort are still going on. **(Tania Kepler, Israel Continues Targeting Palestinian Legislative members)**
- b- Refraining from transferring tax money that she collects as tariffs on commodities imported by the Palestinians through Israeli ports so Hamas government wouldn't be able to pay salaries.
- c- Closing Rafah crossing to Egypt and imposing a sea embargo on Gaza strip.

- d- Preventing the flow of money to the occupied territories of 1967 through the Jordanian Banks that have branches in the territories, and tightening the financial embargo.

On the Arab Level

The Arab regimes were divided in their reaction toward Hamas victory and her government. The Syrian and Qatari regimes expressed readiness to cooperate with Hamas government as a legitimate democratically elected government, (**Roni Ben Efrog, Palestine in Suicide**) while other regimes which are labeled by Israel and the US as moderate showed a kind of animosity and refused to meet Hamas leaders. Jordan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia didn't welcome Khaled Meshal, the head of Hamas political bureau. (He was met sometime later by the Saudis and the Egyptians) Some of them re-evaluated this policy after Hamas control of Gaza.

The labeled moderate Arab regimes participated in the financial siege on Hamas, and refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new government. (**Abdel Bari Atwan, Arab regimes**) Only Qatar had enough courage to express legitimacy and furnished some financial aid. (**The Global Report, Qatar Helps to Fund**)

On the International Level

The US and the Europeans announced from the very beginning that they aren't going to recognize the new government and won't cooperate with it. They said that Hamas has to meet their conditions first which are: the recognition of Israel, the renunciation of terrorism, disarming herself and recognizing the accords with Israel. (**Arab Thought Forum. Democratic Formation in Palestine, p11**) What caused the anger of the US is that Hamas doesn't accept the American conditions for making peace in the area, and she constantly refuses the negotiating table unless certain important issues are settled such as the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes and property in Israel, and the complete unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967. And for a long time, she has been classified by the US as a terrorist organization. (**The White House Spokesman**) The US used the negotiations in the ME in order to get the Arabs normalize their relations with Israel, establish with it normal diplomatic relations, and work together on what is called the prosperity in the area.

The Western donating countries stopped donating money to the Palestinian government, and, together with Israel and the Palestinian Authority led by Abbass, started to watch closely the financial activities of the Jordanian banks in the West bank and Gaza so as to make sure that Hamas wasn't receiving any money. The US and Europe argued that they weren't punishing the Palestinians by halting the financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority. (**Palestinian Center for Human Rights**) They said that they were exerting pressure on Hamas to meet the peace requirements. This argument is unacceptable because Hamas didn't usurp the authority, and didn't jump to the government through illegitimate means. Hamas came to power through elections, the democratic process that the Western countries keep reasserting its principles at all times. The Palestinians chose Hamas, and any punishment to Hamas is actually a punishment to the Palestinian people.

The Outset Moments

Voters expected that Hamas will deal immediately with their concerns after the formation of the new government. They expected that fighting corruption would be at the top of her priorities because it was the main issue bothering the Palestinians in the West bank and Gaza. But Hamas was, apparently, thinking in a different way. That was evident in the following practices:

- 1- Hamas formed a purely Hamas government, and completely disregarded the non-Hamas people who mobilized votes for her. Hamas tried to offer some cabinet posts for other Palestinian factions whose members voted for Fatah, but didn't approach the influential independents who played a big role in her election achievement. That was a strange political behavior, and contradicts the logic of government coalition formation.
- 2- Hamas cabinet members appeared with tuxedos and red ties on the day of inauguration and swear-in ceremony. (**Transmitted on Space Channels**)** That wasn't a message to the Palestinian people who were awaiting field active cabinet members, but most probably to the Americans and the Europeans. That uniform meant that Hamas was ready to get into diplomatic activities salons of diplomacy that require exactly the swear-in clothing style.

Apparently, Hamas wanted to say that she is neither a terrorist organization nor an extremist, and she is ready for table talks and mutual understanding. Anyhow, that was disappointing for the Palestinians who tried to see a more intelligent approach toward the Western countries.

- 3- Instead of getting down to the roots, Hamas jumped into the same governmental cars that were used by Fatah. These red tag cars are signs of provocation for the general public in the West Bank and Gaza, and give the impression that the Palestinian leaders aren't true liberation heroes, but rather big liars who take advantage of the Palestinian cause. Until now, these red tag cars are signs of corruption and exploitation. The people voted Hamas on the hope to fight corruption, but the opposite impression was created. This opposite impression was fortified when the speaker of the legislature asked the president of the authority to release the bullet-proof Mercedes car for his personal use. **(Documented in a letter to the head of the PA and distributed widely in the West bank by Fatah in March 2006, and denied by the Speaker afterwards)** That speaker was supposed to be among his own people living their troubles and pains, but not canned in such a car.
- 4- Immediately after inauguration, Hamas started inflating the already inflated governmental bureaucracy with her own members. Both Fatah and Hamas thought the Palestinian Authority was just a farm of their own, and thought that public jobs are a private commodity. The common interest was disregarded in favor of faction interests.
- 5- Hamas failed from the very beginning in taking the initiative to promote her own policies, and trapped herself in reactions toward Fatah attempts to create restlessness and instability in the West Bank and Gaza. Fatah intentionally started creating confusion through actions such as setting fire in the buildings of the legislative council and the prime ministry, and conducting unpaid salary strikes. Hamas couldn't but react to these actions, although she was supposed to take measures against corruption and push Fatah into a corner. In this point, Hamas showed a great deal of in-experience and lack of statehood.

All of these points indicate how politically immature Hamas was. Hamas members might be brave fighters in a battlefield, but they proved to be poor politicians. They needed to acquire more political skills to be able to tackle political questions efficiently, or to seek help from independent professionals.

Resistance and Authority Dichotomy

As she defines herself, Hamas is a resistance movement which is supposed to remain underground. Under any occupation, resistance movements are covert movements for security reasons and maneuvering tactics against occupation forces. Resistance movements lose militarily if they are overtly active because they are outgunned, and thus exposed to their enemy and become easy targets. The strength of resistance movements doesn't stem primarily from their guns, but from their ability to surprise the enemy through the-hit-and-run tactic. That is why it is unwise for any resistance movement to hold public administrative responsibilities. Public authorities require overt and open interaction with the people, and could never be a subject of underground activity.

Hamas ran for elections so as to become the Palestinian Authority, or, at least, part of it. This meant that Hamas was heading toward overt administrative and legislative roles, a thing that contradicts the requirements of resistance activity.

Hamas and other Palestinian factions had never been strictly cautious security-wise, and they were easily infiltrated by the Israeli intelligence and the intelligence agencies of other countries such as the United States, Jordan and Egypt. The Palestinian factions had been more or less security loose organizations, a thing that partially explains their failures in confronting the Israelis. **(Israeli Mossad Assassinations, Feb, 2011)** Hamas' attempt to participate in the elections constituted a new factor in dispersing the secrets of her membership. That is why the Israelis found no difficulty in identifying Hamas members and targeting them.

The Israelis usually have tremendous information about the Palestinian factions, and traditionally could inflict heavy losses on these factions and on the Palestinian people in general, but Hamas and Jihad Islami became the prime targets after Oslo Accords, and the Israelis found little difficulty in pinpointing the members of the forthcoming authority that doesn't recognize Oslo. The Israelis continued their massacre against Hamas military leaders and recruits particularly in Gaza Strip, and continued arresting her political leaders particularly in the West Bank. **(CNN, Sep 19, 2004, Foxnews, May 30, 2004, The Guardian, Sep 27, 2004)** This is aside from the arrests conducted by the Palestinian security service whose members were supposed to liberate Palestine.

Because of security concerns, Hamas was advised by many people not to run for elections, and furnish support to independents who agree with her on political issues. And she was advised after the elections not to form the government, and be satisfied only with the legislature which holds control of the government through the vote of confidence, but never responded. This made Hamas national burden heavier, and she had to seek ways and methods to smuggle the desperately needed money to cover the expenses of the authority.

Security Chaos

With the advent of the Palestinian Authority, as mentioned earlier, the phenomenon of gangsters started to develop. This phenomenon means that armed non-disciplined authority supported people started to appear in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the purpose of threatening and frightening people so that opposition to Arafat's leadership and his Oslo project will not develop. This phenomenon was just a copy of Arafat's conduct toward his opponents in Lebanon in both the refugee camps and the Lebanese cities.

Guns found their way to the hands of Palestinian young and uneducated people who found themselves free to use fire power in different forms such as killing or maiming or just terrorizing and intimidating. They used to roam the streets day and night extorting people and putting them under security stress, and could silence the general public, and the opposition to Arafat. The writer of this paper was targeted by these gangsters and hit by four bullets in 1995, and his car burnt three times.

Calls from many people were continuously made to Yasser Arafat to end the phenomenon, but with no avail. Certainly, he wasn't expected to respond positively because he had a long experience in this kind of behavior to quell the opposition and to remain the sole uncontested leader. (**Sattar Kassem, At-Tareeq ela Al-Hazeema, pp 150-165**) This phenomenon continued to exist after Arafat, and the Palestinian security service such as the intelligence and the preventive security had a stake in that. On the footsteps of Arab security service, these security branches were very much hated by the people, and their leaderships and recruits needed to protect themselves without provoking international criticism or embarrassing the US and Israel. These gangsters were a safe and a good way in carrying out the dirty job.

With the ascent of Hamas to power, the gangsters escalated their efforts to intensify the security chaos particularly in the big cities such as Nablus and the city of Gaza. Many governmental offices were targeted, and the number of maimed people started to increase. There is a lack of good statistics about that, but it was evident to ordinary people that the number of knee-shot people was increasing.

With this development, Hamas had to face reality; that is, the Palestinian security service isn't actually Palestinian but Fatah. The Palestinian Police, together with the preventive security and the intelligence refused to cooperate with the new government, and even didn't try to carry out their responsibilities in observing the civil security of the Palestinians, a thing that meant cooperation with the gangsters. The Palestinian government found itself crippled, paralyzed and functionless. Hamas came to the conclusion that these security branches were designed to keep Fatah in power, but not to protect the Palestinians from security provocations and law preachers.

Hamas' immediate reaction concentrated on the creation of her own security service. She needed to defend herself and protect her government. That was possible and easy to manage in the Gaza Strip for a couple of reasons: the Israeli Occupation wasn't there, and Hamas had her own fighters who were adopting resistance against Israel. Very easily, Hamas reorganized her fighters under the title of the executive force to become civil servants or the guardians of civil security in the face of Fatah recruits. With the appearance of this force, it became evident that Hamas worked hard over the years to smuggle and obtain arms, and secretly train people on guerilla warfare. This force proved to be committed, well-organized and well disciplined. The PA found the development very dangerous, and her president decided to outlaw the new force. (**Richard Bourdeaux, Los Angeles Times**)

Hamas couldn't duplicate the attempt in the West bank because of the Israeli occupation. The Israelis were encouraging Fatah to arm herself and to do whatever to protect Oslo accords, while they were hard on Hamas because of her intention to continue the fight against the occupation. The Israeli policy toward the Palestinians has always encouraged collaborators and peaceful solution seekers, and has been hard against who insist on restoring the basic Palestinian national rights and on armed resistance. That is why it is thought that Fatah in the West bank is actually under the Israeli protection.

Hamas missed strategic thinking, and started thinking of revenge. Hamas gunmen started appearing in the streets, terrorizing people, and shooting opponents. Many Fatah members were either killed or maimed, and the cycle of violence started to escalate. **(The Independent, May 15, 2007)** This reaction asserts Hamas incapability to think Palestinian, and her lack of a strategic long-range vision of the Palestinian cause. Her thinking was limited to faction-status, and to reactions that quell the eagerness of revenge.

The internal war

Hamas leaders warned several times that the siege on Hamas government would lead to internal fighting between the Palestinian factions. **(Moussa Abu-Marzouk, May 16, 2007)** the prophecy became true and fighting erupted. The security chaos in Gaza came to an end when Hamas decided to take over the strip, dismantle the pro-Fatah Palestinian security forces, and end all kinds of security coordination with the Israelis. Hamas forces issued an ultimatum to Fatah forces on the 12/June/2007, **(Reuters)** and swept all of Gaza Strip on 14/June/2007. Fatah forces were easily and quickly defeated, **(New York Times, June 14, 2007)** and actually, Fatah military leadership fled the battlefield before the battle started.

Hamas, to the dismay of the Israelis and the Americans, held control of all security installations which were built by the Americans, and gained all installations and military infrastructure built by the Western countries to suit Fatah's military tasks. **(Jeffery White, the Washington Institute)** Both the Americans and the Israelis were so much surprised by the quick and decisive victory that Hamas achieved over the PA forces although these forces were well trained and equipped. **(Joyce Chediak, International Action Center)** Probably the Americans and the Israelis realized that the PA forces lack commitment and loyalty.

This war marked an end to pan Hamas government, and Hamas dominated legislative council. Hamas found herself in control of Gaza Strip, and had to run the daily and the civil life of the Palestinians there, and had to be satisfied with a legislative council limited to Gaza's elected Hamas members. The Strip was separated administratively from the West Bank, and was liberated from the Accords with Israel and from all international commitments shadowed or dictated by the accords. And thus, Hamas had to pass a real administrative, financial, economic and security test.

Although Hamas in Gaza had to work hard toward a successful administrative and management performance, Hamas of the West bank was left to her destiny of unprecedented repressive measures from the side of the PA. Hamas and the PA started a wave of repression, each against the members of the other side, each within her domain. And the Palestinians had to live under extreme security pressures, in addition to the pressure exerted by the Israeli forces.

The war in Gaza led to the following conclusions:

- 1- In face of Fatah's gangster-like behavior, Hamas was preparing herself for a confrontation, and her recruits proved to be brave fighters and ready to die for their cause. While Fatah ascertained her vita of pronouncing so many revolutionary slogans and fleeing the battlefield.
- 2- Israel and the western countries were so much disappointed, and lost hope in Fatah as a viable partner for peace making. That is why it was expected for Fatah to lose her political status, and for the West to seek a new negotiations partner.
- 3- The same as Fatah, Hamas was held responsible for the fighting. Both organizations lost so much of their popularity in the West Bank and Gaza

The Siege on Gaza

Local, Arab and international efforts to strangle Hamas started as Hamas won the legislative elections of 2006. Many parties felt a political blow and real political defeat particularly Fatah, Israel and the US. These parties together with most of the Arab regimes worked very hard over the years in preparing a negotiating table that led to Palestinian recognition of Israel and the long standing Israeli goal of creating an Arab or a Palestinian authority in the West Bank and Gaza. The result of the elections endangered the political achievements toward what is labeled as the just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

As mentioned earlier, Fatah was the spearhead in engaging Hamas on the hope that a political collapse in the occupied territories of 1967 would ensue, and Fatah would be back to the authority due to a popular demand.

The objective was clear and clearly pronounced; i.e., to topple Hamas as a result of failure in managing the daily and the civil life of the Palestinians. That is why the donating countries decided not to pump any money to the Palestinian government aiming at revolutionizing the governmental employees against Hamas.

If the American definition of terrorism to be adopted, then one can conclude that the Western countries practiced extortion and terrorism against Hamas. The American definition states that terrorism is the use of violence and the exertion of power against civilians and governments so as to obtain political goals. Or as the Department of Defense put it *“The calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”* This is exactly what the Americans and the Europeans did through holding money so that the Palestinian civilians would topple their own elected government. They wanted to spur pain and exploit it for revolutionizing the pained. Besides, that Western behavior was in paradox with the democratic principles that Western countries have been propagating.

The anti-Hamas forces finally succeeded in dragging Hamas to the internal war. Although these forces lost the internal war in Gaza, Hamas became confined in Gaza. But that posed a real challenge to the negotiations process because Gaza Strip is already out of the calculations that would lead to the peace as defined by both the Americans and the Israelis. Gaza emerged independent, and outside the limits of Oslo Accords. This eventually meant that the negotiations process will ultimately come to a halt because Israel would never accept a final settlement without a signature that is thought to represent both Gaza and the West Bank.

This explains why the West, the Arab regimes and the PA went for besieging Gaza. This siege materialized in the following policies:

- 1- All concerned parties decided to prevent all money transfers to Gaza whether through banks or through ordinary individuals and smuggling. They started imposing so many constraints on money transfers, and make sure that Hamas wouldn't be receiving any money.
- 2- The PA issued orders to Fatah employees in Gaza not to go to work if they wanted to receive their salaries, and considered cooperation with Hamas as treason. The Palestinian governmental home-paid salaries employees still receive these salaries until the time of writing this paper.
- 3- Israel started to intensify military attacks on security installations and individuals.
- 4- Egypt closed Rafah crossing, and limited the movement back and forth to extreme humanitarian cases. The Egyptian measures were so tight to the extent that Gaza, at one time, was completely isolated from the rest of the world, and the extremely grave health cases weren't allowed to pass from Gaza to Egypt.
- 5- As the above steps didn't work, all parties decided to impose a complete siege on Gaza that movement in all directions of all people including the seriously ill would come to a halt.

Storming the borders

As the siege tightened, some Gazans started expressing their anger against the Egyptian policemen in the other side of the borders. Some say that Hamas ordered her own security service to increasingly elevate tension with the Egyptian forces that is observing the tight siege on the Strip, while Hamas denies that. **(Al Aqsa TV, Jan. 24, 2008)** The writer of this article believes that Hamas recruits would never shoot at the other side without orders or, at least, the tacit consent of the political leadership. The situation in Gaza became extremely unbearable, **(Al Mezan Center For Human Rights, July 2007)** and the logical expected reaction soon found materialization. Generally, warring armies leave space or an outlet for a besieged army to retreat or pull out from the battlefield because that eases the determination of the soldiers to fight to the end. This little battlefield wisdom disappeared in tightening the siege on Gaza, and, consequently, the Palestinians decided to storm the borders with Egypt and bring the siege to an end.

Hamas could destroy the Egyptian obstacles built on the borders on Jan 23, 2008, and the Gazans flooded into Egyptian Rafah to buy their needs. The Egyptian side was taken into surprise, and the whole siege became under criticism from the mass media world-wide. The Egyptian government couldn't develop a reaction easily, and ex-president Husni Mubarak issued a statement after few days calling on his government to keep the borders opened until the Palestinians finish shopping their needs. **(A statement by Mubarak on Feb 5, 2008)** Most probably, that is why Tony Blair of Britain declared that the siege on Gaza is counterproductive. **(Daily Times, June 5, 2010)**

It was noticeable that Mubarak's mass media kept reiterating that Egypt was exposed to external invasion and violations of Egypt's sovereignty. Hamas on her side explained that the Palestinians of the Strip were left with no choices, and that wasn't an invasion but an act of desperation. Actually, the argument of violating Egypt's sovereignty which was shared by the Palestinian Authority appeared to be very silly. The Israelis and the Americans who strongly advocated the tight siege understood the popular move against the borders. Ban ki-moon of the United Nations realized afterwards that the siege was an unbearable mistake, and it must be lifted. **(The Voice of America, June 2, 2010)**

Hamas ended with partial success in a sense that the forces interested in the blockade decided not to go back to full siege. Israel decided to supply Gaza with her needs particularly the energy supplies, but abstained from allowing cement to enter Gaza because of her fears that Hamas would use it for building underground bunkers. **(Israel Today Magazine, April 22, 2011)** From her side, Egypt also decided to ease the siege and allow for partial movement of humanitarian cases such as ill people and university students. And all anti-Hamas parties apparently agreed to implant a steel wall along the borders so that the Palestinians wouldn't be able to dig tunnels and cross the borders from underneath. **(BBC News, Dec. 2009)** That wall that went around ten meters underground curbed the Palestinian attempts to dig tunnels but could not completely overcome it.

The War on Gaza

Due to failure in bringing Hamas to her knees, and to the increasing ability of the Palestinian resistance to rocket Israel, Israel decided to wage a war on Gaza. That was, according to some Israeli pronouncements for ending the existing political situation in Gaza. It was understood that parties interested in the negotiations process decided to topple Hamas by military force, and get Gaza back to the administration of the Palestinian Authority. However, the Israelis started to lower their aims as the war proceeded, and were satisfied with silencing the rockets launched from Gaza toward Israel. **(Chris McGreal, Why Israel Went to War in Gaza)**

Israel started her war with horror or shock attacks that was extremely destructive and mass-killing. On her first wave of bombings, around 280 Palestinians were killed most of them were police trainees. **(France Press)** Some military experts thought that Hamas would surrender, but that was just a wish. Hamas and other resistance movements such as Islamic Jihad decided to face the Israeli army. As the war proceeded, it became evident that the Palestinian resistance was dug underground and ready for combating the Israeli army, in a way similar in certain ways to Hezbollah tactics. **(Scott Farquhar, p. 52)**

The Israeli army inflicted so much damage to Palestinian installations and buildings. Killed more than 1400 people, but couldn't occupy the city of Gaza. Simply, Hamas remained there intact, and could declare victory because the Israelis couldn't achieve their objective in getting Gaza back to Ramallah or eliminating rocket attacks.

Seeking International Recognition

One of Hamas major illogical activities is the endeavor to gain international recognition. Hamas has been approaching several Arab and Moslem states, and some other western and eastern states. Also she has been trying to establish contacts with the Europeans and the Americans hoping to create channels of mutual communication, and ultimately to gain recognition. Generally, she has established good contacts with Qatar, Turkey, Syria and Iran, and dwindling ones with Russia and Egypt. She failed in opening lines with most of the Arab and the Western influential countries. Lately, some Arab doors for Hamas have been unlocked because she has been turning her back to Syria.

Since she won the elections, Hamas has been trying to show gestures that she is a moderate Islamic organization that abhors terrorism and appreciates international cooperation and peaceful approaches to all issues. She has been stressing her differences with other Islamic resistance (Jihadi) movements such as al-Qaeda and Taliban, and refraining from carrying any military action against Israel abroad. Moreover, she expressed her willingness to accept a Palestinian state on the West bank and Gaza strip without recognizing Israel, but with a long truce of upholding military action from all sides.

As mentioned earlier, Hamas showed a sign of diplomacy-leaning on the day of inauguration as a government by wearing formal suits and red ties.

She has been trying to augment relations with the Russians, and to establish relations with the English and the French. On the Arab level, Hamas has been trying to formulate normal relations with countries allying with the West like Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Very little success has been achieved, but Hamas continues to assert practically and diplomatically that she isn't a terrorist organization, and would like to solve the Palestinian problem peacefully. And she went to the point of accepting a Palestinian state on the West bank and Gaza, but without recognizing Israel. (**Zahhar, may 5, 2011**)

The point here is that Hamas is trying to establish relations with what might be called the international system, or international society led by the US without abiding by its rules and illegibility necessities. This international society which is mostly dominated the US, some major European powers and Israel doesn't allow space for those who don't recognize Israel and carry guns as an alternative to peaceful solution for the conflict. This was evident in the case of the PLO. Although Arafat showed many signs toward a peaceful approach to the conflict, the Americans didn't set down in a dialogue with a PLO representative until the Palestinian National Council decided to recognize UN Security council resolutions 242 and 338, recognize Israel and renounce terrorism. Arafat couldn't enter the salons of diplomacy until he fulfilled the conditions of illegibility. Apparently, the US is using the same approach toward Hamas hoping to reach the same conclusion of the PLO, the Americans open channels of indirect contacts, (**Khaled Abu Toameh, US Administration ...**) and give the other side enough time to meditate.

Hamas is trying to get into those salons with her own measures, and that isn't going to work out. She will gain a permit if she copies Arafat's experience. Hamas has been wasting so much of her time in convincing the international community led by the US that she deserves a role in the deliberations. Besides, she has been alienating some of her supporters who don't believe that Israel and the US would ever recognize the Palestinian basic national rights atop of which is the right of return. These supporters always question the wisdom behind these efforts.

Besides, Hamas became under extreme criticism from several resistance organizations. For Fatah, Hamas attempts to get into international diplomatic activity is a duplication of Fatah's experience, and if it took Fatah around 20 years to set on the table with the Western countries, Hamas quick steps would take few years. Fatah appear to be pleased with Hamas diplomatic activities because that proves, according to Fatah, that Fatah's diplomatic moves have been wise and well-calculated. And all of the criticism that Hamas directed against Fatah because of the accords with Israel are just propaganda for local consumption.

For other Palestinian resistance organizations, Hamas moves were un-necessary, fruitless and a waste of time and effort. These parties together with many independent intellectuals tried to convince Hamas not to continue her approach toward the Western countries, and to refrain from introducing political initiatives toward a temporary solution for the conflict.

Conclusions

Hamas has been taking several steps toward overcoming the threats of the siege and the attempts of removal. Some of them were fruitful and successful, while others weren't up to the expectations. The following sum up these steps:

- 1- Hamas had to think of ways and methods toward self-dependency, or, at least, toward reducing her dependence on others. Hamas found her-self going the other direction, and facing major regional and international powers, and has to be up to the necessities of her choice. She couldn't depend upon humanitarian appeals to feed the people in Gaza, or upon an ethical code that respects the will of others. She knew before hand that she has to be self-dependent in food security and gaining self-respect. And most importantly, for protecting her free political will, and the basic national rights of the Palestinians. So she had to look first for alternative financial resources, and allocate some of them for development particularly in the field of agriculture.
- 2- Hamas succeeded in smuggling money and guns to Gaza through the tunnels that the Palestinians have been digging beneath the Palestinian-Egyptian borders. It is thought that Iran, Syria and Hezbollah played a major role in relieving Gaza financially, and in smuggling guns. She won a war against a Palestinian faction equipped and trained by Israel and some Western countries, and could stand firmly in face of a huge Israeli army, and rendered the Israeli efforts unsuccessful.

- 3- Hamas succeeded in surviving the worst siege to be known in history against a small number of people and a tiny piece of land. Hamas has been encircled by the world except for some states and organizations such as Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Turkey, and could survive with improving the conditions of survival. All of the big and powerful besieging countries thought that the collapse of Hamas was a matter of few months, but four years have elapsed so far. All of this steadfastness is not the outcome of a military arsenal but a result of determination and resolve. Hamas people are devoted and committed, and they are always ready to sacrifice their lives for what they describe as a holy cause.
- 4- Hamas failed in mobilizing all the people of Gaza behind her policies. Fatah people remained to a great extent loyal to the PA in Ramallah, and the other Palestinian organizations remained either alienated such as Islamic Jihad, or unwilling to separate from the PA such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. This failure reflects the spirit and practice of the Moslem Brothers who generally don't trust others.
- 5- Hamas failed in protecting herself from un-needed Israeli commodities that drain the financial resources of the people. In her import policy, she remained on the old Palestinian behavior of consuming Israeli commodities at the expense of Palestinian production such as the vegetables, fruits and other light consumption goods such as chocolate bars. This economic policy started to change a little bit, but it is doubtful if Gaza can adopt an effective policy of economic independence due to objective facts such as the small area of the Strip which is only km² 365.
- 6- Hamas is mistaken in approaching the international community led by the US with resistance standards. She can either alter her standards to suit Israel and the US or exert military pressure to the extent of leaving no space for the US and Israel but to set to the negotiating table. The first choice isn't feasible because it is in contradiction with the doctrine of the Moslem brothers, and consequently with that of Hamas; the other is feasible only through a regionally coordinated military effort. Hamas might reach such a conclusion if she becomes part of a military alliance that overturns the military balance in the region or ends the Israeli air supremacy. In other words, both choices aren't at hand.

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