

Palestine's Foreign Policy under Hamas: Principles and Practices

Abeer Alsarhi* Zaid Ahmad

Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia

Abstract

This paper examines Palestine's foreign policy under Hamas's Government (2006-2013). The aim is to explore the major principles underpinning the formulation of its foreign policy. Data were collected through face-to-face interview with five key persons in Hamas, secondary data were collected from books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and other relevant resources. The analysis was done through descriptive-analytical method. The findings revealed that Hamas foreign policies were formulated based on six agenda, namely: Islamic ethics, strategic vision, supporting of the resistance, protection of the national interests, non-interference, and independency of decision. Resistance has remained the only means of struggle against the occupation. These principles would be critically measured and contextually analyzed to see the implications towards the protection of Palestinians and the Hamas interests.

Keywords: Palestine, Hamas, foreign policy, occupation

1. Introduction

Foreign policies that are formulated in any country should be capable protecting its national interests. It consists of strategies to safeguard national interests and to achieve goals within its international relations (Nye & Keohane, 1971). It is one of the wheels which underpin the process of international politics. Every nation has its own right to formulate its own strategies in its foreign policy formulation (see, Joshi & Srivastava, 2005 and Beasley & Kaarbo, 2012). Such strategies could involve military power, land defense, technology and ideology in the context of individual nation interests. It is a primary concern of any nation is to have the foreign policy consistent to its national interests. This reality also applies to the Palestinian state under Hamas led government. The Hamas led government came into power after a landslide victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections on January 2006 (see, Scham & Abu-Irshaid, 2009 and Abu-Helal, 2014).

It is important to bear in mind that Hamas holds a key role in the Palestinian politics, just as a hard number that cannot be bypassed in any politics equation. Some studies in the Palestinian politics and international relations seem to have only focused on the pretext against Hamas of being a government that supports resistance and being against Quartet conditions (Saleh, 2013; Zweiri, 2006). Others have focused on Hamas' commitments to its initial goals and demands (Abu-Helal, 2014; Lovlie & Knudsen, 2013). What are not yet clear are the Hamas foreign policy objectives in advancing the course of Palestinian national interests. This study was carried out the measure Hamas foreign policies in the context of Palestinian national interest during the period of 2006-2013. This paper is based on research conducted with a qualitative approach based on case study method to collect data through interviews. A total of five key persons in Hamas Government were interviewed (the Prime Minister, two ministers from Foreign Affairs, a head of foreign relations, and one scholar in Palestinian studies).

2. Historical Overview

Hamas is an acronym for an Arabic term, *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* or the Islamic Resistance Movement in English translation, and an acronym for the Arabic 'zeal' or 'fervour' (Zuhur, 2008; Barsky & Committee, 2006; Abu-Amr, 1993). This movement started with the first *Intifada* (a Palestinian first uprising against the Israeli occupation) in 1987 and followed by the formal Hamas' formation in 1988 to develop new effective techniques in resisting the Israeli occupation. Hamas describes itself as a Palestinian national liberation movement that struggles for the liberation of the Palestinian occupied territories and for the recognition of the legitimate rights of Palestinians (Hroub, 2009; 2007). For that reason, Hamas is considered the most prominent movement that represents the Islamic ideological line of the Palestinian. Shortly after its inception, the Movement defined itself as a "wing of Palestinian Muslim Brothers" (El-Hamad & Al-Bargothi, 2010; Scham & Abu-Irshaid, 2009; Levitt, 2008). Hamas' representatives then declared that "the Islamic Resistance Movement is the armed wing for the Society of the Muslim Brothers" (Gunning, 2004; Charter, 1988).

The 1990s witnessed many treaties between Fatah the ruling party of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel. These treaties resulted only in legitimizing the Israeli occupation on most of the Palestinian lands (Khalidi, 1991). Since the signature of the Oslo Accords in September 1993 between Fatah and Israel mainly to recognise each other, Hamas had been in opposition against it (Saleh, 2014). During this period, the main thrust of Hamas' activities was in social, charitable, educational, and political programs aimed for the Palestinians. Based on such focus, Hamas has been a refuge for many of those Palestinians who against the Oslo initiative (Zuhur, 2008). Over time, the Oslo accords crumbled, due to the increasing strife between Fatah and Hamas. At the same time,

ordinary Palestinians began to support Hamas more strongly (Saleh, 2014).

Hamas' resistance continued during the Oslo years from 1993 until 2000, when the Second *Intifada* erupted. Until the upsurge of the second *Intifada*, Hamas' popularity, as indicated by repeated public polls, never exceeded that of Fatah. Things changed after the second *Intifada* which was followed by the Palestinian local and national elections in 2005/2006 [the election of Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in 25 January 2006] (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010). In that election, Hamas shocked the world by winning a landslide victory, which meant putting the permanently ill-fated peace process to an end (Abu-Amr, 2007; Hroub, 2006). Hamas won the majority of the seats in the PLC in its first participation in the national elections. Based on the Palestinian Basic law, President Mahmud 'Abbas assigned Hamas leader Isma'il Haniyyah to form the government after consultations with the Reform and Change Bloc, which formed the parliament's majority (Abu-Helal, 2014). For the first time in its history, the Palestinian government is set to be led by the Hamas party (Pina, 2006).

Following the 2006 Palestinian legislative election, the Palestinian's schism due to the struggles between the Fatah and Hamas movements as well as the geographical division in the PA administration between Ramallah and Gaza Strip paralyzed the PLO institutions. Hamas had then functioned as the de facto ruler in the Gaza Strip, forming an alternative Hamas Government in Gaza. Consequently, the Israelis imposed a siege on the GS since 2007 as a collective punishment on its people and carried out two military operations in 2008/2009 and 2012 to undermine the resisting factions there.

As such, the Palestinian course was going through a crucial time in history due to the successive events in the region (Manna', 2013). Nonetheless, the outcomes of the Arab Spring, in addition to the Israeli acts of organized terrorism against the Palestinian people and the massacres it has brought in its wake, led to more disastrous circumstances in which the Gaza people had to suffer (Khalidi, 2007). The miseries dispensed on the Gaza people also included acts against humanity in Palestinian cities, villages, and refugee camps, in addition to the unjust siege imposed on the stubbornly steadfast people of the GS (Al-Kaddoumi, 2014). Hamas rose as a major player in the Palestinian arena after it played an essential role and won the legislative elections 2006. It led the Palestinian government in the Gaza Strip, successfully thwarted the Israeli aggression on the Strip, and maintained great popularity both inside and outside Palestine (Saleh, 2014). A new phase that was started in the history of Palestinian governments lasted until March 2013, despite being an interim government (Abu-Helal, 2014).

3. The External Policies of Hamas

Hamas' early international relations started late in 1992, after it developed good political stature and influential popularity base as well as a reasonable Arab and Islamic relations. However, Hamas' relations with foreign countries were still in their infancy. This can be attributed to the subjective reasons that were related to the Movement itself as well as the objective reasons that were connected with the position of each foreign country (El-Hamad & Al-Bargothi, 2010). By developing relations with the Arab and Islamic countries, Hamas aimed at establishing its presence in the Arab political scene, obtaining official recognition and understanding of its viewpoints, opening new horizons for its political activities and, finally, gaining material and moral support for the Palestinian people's struggles. Having a firm belief that the Palestinian issue is an Arab and Islamic concern in essence, Hamas adopted, certain policies which emphasized cooperation with the Arab and Islamic countries indiscriminately to serve the common cause, regardless of political systems or ideological backgrounds (El-Hamad & Al-Bargothi, 2010; Carroll, 2005).

Hamas also insisted on non-interference in the internal affairs of any countries and refused any interference on its own. It also committed itself to the principle that the scene of the conflict with Israel was limited to the Palestinian territories. It refused the policy of conflicting poles and axes (El-Hamad & Al-Bargothi, 2010). Likewise, Misha'al (2012) states, "We will not intervene in the affairs of other countries and we will not engage in discussions, conflicts or alliances with other nations. We have adopted the policy of opening up to the different countries of the world, especially the Arab and Islamic countries."

In building political relations with the foreign countries, Hamas aimed at projecting itself very clearly and directly to such countries so as to correct the tarnished image portrayed by the media. It also strived to find supporters in these countries, avoiding foreign measures against it, gaining some representations abroad, and obtaining political and material support for its struggle against the occupation. In so doing, Hamas endeavored to communicate and cooperate with all countries regardless of their political or ideological backgrounds. Additionally, it was anxious to avoid transferring the scene of the conflict into foreign countries or to create enmity with any foreign powers. Instead, Hamas sought to partake in any international effort that aims at supporting the Palestinian people (El-Hamad & Al-Bargothi, 2010).

After positioning itself as an important part of the Palestinian political scene, Hamas decided to move onto the outside world and establish political relations with the neighboring countries in order to introduce itself to these neighbors (El-Hamad & Al-Bargothi, 2010; Hroub, 2000). As a result, it managed to open several

offices in some Arab and Islamic countries. International interest in Hamas, and from the Americans in particular, increased after the Israeli deported 413 Hamas members and supporters to the Marj al-Zohour - in Arabic, 'field of flowers' - area in Lebanon in late 1992. Hamas then intensified its direct contacts with the ambassadors and diplomats of several Western countries, thus confirming its general foreign policies of openness to, and dialogue with, all countries and organizations abroad.

After joining the Palestinian Government in 2007, it resumed its communications with some of the Europeans and then participated in many Islamic and Arab official meetings. Indeed, the Russian initiative to receive Hamas officials and held talks with the movement at the Russian foreign minister's level reflected both sides' desire to reinforce the connections amongst themselves (Al-Khazendar, 2009). In its first statement as a newly-formed Palestinian government, Hamas expressed the orientation of its foreign policy and its perspectives on the international institutions. It intended to move towards more involvement and openness in the region. Moreover, it seeks the attention of international community along with all of its institutions and international forces. They also emphasized the necessity of dialogue with the external environment and the rejection of all forms of political, intellectual, or cultural self-inflicted seclusion (Al-Khazendar, 2009). Ismail Haniyyah asserts that "the government's assiduity in establishing healthy and strong relations with the various world countries as well as with the international institutions, including the United Nations and Security Council. According to what facilitates peace and world stability, we are engaged in a solid and strong relationship with the European Union, although we expect from it to reconsider some of its followed policies regarding the conflict in the region." "The Prime Minister's Speech to the Legislative Council to Gain the Confidence Motion for his Government" (Al-Quds, 2007).

According to Rizqa (2014), in evaluating position on internal and external politics from theory to practice, Hamas adopted flexible attitudes. Hamas took part in building many political alliances with both the secular and leftwing Palestinian factions who were against the occupation, the Oslo Accords, and Fatah's monopoly on decision-making. Hamas's practical conduct has prompted researchers to state that "Hamas has overcome the barrier of secularism in its alliances with others." Some have explained this as duplicitous but, for Hamas, it was a legitimate tactic and was part of what was acceptable under the Shariah law, which accommodates supreme interests and priorities when interacting with reality. Hamas's practical position can be attributed to three main reasons: The first reason is the overall political situation in Palestine, which focused on liberation over theoretical and ideological differences. The second reason is Hamas's rising strength and clout. The third reason is the evolution of Hamas's political ideology and its experience in power and in assuming public responsibilities.

According to El-Hamad and Al-Bargothi (2010), in its various political activities, Hamas had shown a considerable amount of consistency with its principles. It should be noted also that Hamas used the Islamic doctrinal concept that can be translated as balancing the good and evil considerations or arranging preferences among various possibilities while still committing itself to its basic principles. In such an endeavor, Hamas had been able to strike a balance between Islamic principles and spirit on the one hand and contemporary political practices and techniques on the other.

4. The Constraints and Political Challenges

A functional structure made up Hamas' landslide victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections on January 2006 came as an unwelcome and unexpected shock to both Middle Eastern and international regimes (Scham & Abu-Irshaid, 2009). The victory of Hamas confounded the Fatah and Israel and affected the peace process as everyone involved attempted to control or topple Hamas (Saleh, 2014). The Hamas government was then faced with international and Israeli rejections, with Israel declaring it as a government that supports "terrorism." The USA also announced that it will not deal with any Palestinian government that had not explicitly accepted the Quartet conditions (Abu-Helal, 2014; Zweiri, 2006). However, Hamas remained committed to its initial goals and demands, which included ending the Israeli occupation, maintaining an armed resistance, insisting on the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and establishing a Palestinian state "from the river to the sea" with Jerusalem as its capital. These goals contradicted the Quartet Principles, which required Hamas to recognize Israel, adhere to previous agreements, and renounce resistance in exchange for international recognition (Abu-Helal, 2014; Lovlie and Knudsen, 2013; Zweiri, 2006). This resulted in the economic, political, and military pressures on Hamas (Abu-Helal, 2014).

According to Haniyyah (2014), "When Hamas took part in the parliamentary elections, we were fully aware of the challenges that will face it because they come on the stage of a new type. What was expected has happened, and the siege began with the election results and the announcement of its intention to form a government motion, and the process to fail Hamas internally and externally. And it appears that there are those who did not accept these results and handed them a formality, but work on abortion and infanticide experience in the first few months, and some bet on the fall of the government after a period not exceeding three months." Numerous efforts at reconciliation failed and attempts at forming a national unity government proved elusive.

Therefore, since the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004 and Hamas' emergence as a plausible candidate for national leadership, Hamas was locked in an on-going rivalry for leadership with the PLO and PA, a situation that has sustained the national division until now (Hamdan, 2013; Brown, 2012). In short, the Fatah command, after around 40 years of monopolizing the leadership, was no longer used or wished to have a real transfer of power, particularly with sides that have opposing ideologies, strategies, and priorities like the Islamic movement (Saleh, 2014).

All the informants believed that the vision of Hamas on Palestinian national interest is completely different with the previous administration view, there has been opposed on the subject of the concept of the national interest that means "conflict of national interest". This was further stated by Saleh, (2014); Brown, (2012) that, the Palestinian internal situation was, and still is, faced with two different visions and paths in dealing with the priorities and fundamentals of the national work. They have two different approaches to managing the struggle with Israel; resistance and peace settlement, and they have different ways in dealing with Arab and international states (Saleh, 2014; Brown, 2012) [see Fig.1]. Hence, it would not be fair to simplify the differences between Fatah and Hamas by saying that they were merely struggles for power. One cannot explain the steadfastness of Hamas in the face of the Israeli siege and aggression on the Gaza Strip, the shutting down of its institutions, the imprisonment of its PLC members, and the pursuit of its supporters in the West Bank, as being merely a wish to have a better position in power. On the other hand, one cannot explain Fatah's persistence to see Hamas recognize the PLO agreements and form a government whose political program adheres to the PLO's program and the Quartet's conditions, except in the light of pushing Hamas towards a political program that includes the recognition of Israel and the relinquishment of most of occupied Palestine in 1948 as well as the ceasing of resistance actions, which contradicts the principles of Hamas (Saleh, 2014; Hamdan, 2013). Hence, Hamas suffered from Fatah's collaboration with the occupation in the West Bank to pursue and eradicate Hamas along with the mutual media and security campaigns against each other (Saleh, 2014).

Since the formation of the Hamas government in 2006, the government faced a strict international economic siege. The siege further increased after the Palestinian division in mid-June 2007 and that made the Gaza Strip become greatly dependent on smuggling activities through the tunnels on its borders with Egypt. The mechanism of the Rafah crossing operations and its opening days were part of the government's daily problems (Felesteen, 2011) because these were influenced by the political and security developments in Egypt as well as Hamas-Egyptian relations. Hamas took over the functions of the government while it was suffering a severe financial crisis because of the siege (Abu-Helal, 2014). On the financial and economic levels, the international siege continued with some Arab aid being prevented from reaching the government's treasury. Consequently, the drastic economic and financial situations reached unprecedented levels. Although some major Arab aids were then allowed, the holding tax funds by Israel, the delay in transferring the Arab and international aid, and the accumulation of financial crises suffered from the previous governments led to the swelling of the government's debt owed to the private sector. Thus, the government failed to implement its projects, which resulted in delayed wages payment that led to labour strikes and work disruptions as well as a paralysis of the government's key services (Al-Ayyam, 2007; Ma'an, 2007).

The Hamas government also faced several obstacles in addition to the usual ones faced by all the preceding governments, such as financial deficiency, Israeli practices and weak security control on the ground. However, this was the first government to be formed by the Hamas after Fatah monopolized the formation of previous Palestinian governments. Thus, the early period of this government witnessed a less than smooth transfer of power. The international economic and political siege imposed on the government when Hamas rejected the conditions imposed by the Quartet as well as Fatah cadres' control of the high administrative positions in the PA institutions curtailed the ability of the Hamas government to implement its program in light of the differences between the ministers and their teams. The government started its work despite lacking funds and, in order to lift the international financial siege, agreed that the international aid be transferred to the presidency rather than the Ministry of Finance, thus depriving the government of an important power source. It was a very difficult mission under the international and regional sieges (Abu-Helal, 2014).

Furthermore, the government faced additional burdens due to the Israeli battles on the Gaza Strip, especially Operation Cast Lead in 2008–2009, and sometimes it had to work under exceptional circumstances. For instance, some institutions had to work temporarily in tents after the shelling and destruction of their buildings (PIC, 2009). The Israeli battles also saw a large number of families lose their breadwinners and this further burdened the government with extra expenses as those families' financial aids amounted to millions of dollars (Assabeel, 2010). Moreover, the blockade on the Gaza Strip prevented the speedy reconstruction of the buildings damaged from the Israeli battles. This matter was gravely compounded by the political differences between Fatah and Hamas as well as by the international siege that targeted some construction materials. Politically, the Hamas government faced international discrimination where its members faced many restrictions while Fatah and other independent members were allowed to visit international capitals and meet their

counterparts in different countries. Therefore, the government's attempts to confirm its unity and reject discrimination failed to change this situation (Ma'an, 2007).

5. Palestinian National Interests: The Hamas Vision

The Palestinian national interests remain one of the cardinal responsibilities of any government to protect. This objective aimed to explore how Hamas perceived the national interests of Palestine and how these national interests influenced its foreign policy at the international level. The current study found that the protection of the national rights of the Palestinians, namely the right of return and the right of liberating the land is central to Hamas regime. To substantiate this insight, almost all the respondents showed their commitment to it. For instance, informant C describes that the national interest is the interests of the land, people, and power. And any actions to liberate the land or any part thereof, and everything to achieve the Palestinian right of returning to the homeland, are located in the political circle of Hamas's national interest vision, (Informant, C). This is in line with the previous observations by Abu-Helal (2014) and Mish'al (2012).

In the related flow of ideas, informant A stresses that national interests remained one of the main paths that the Hamas movement used to achieve the political and economic objectives. The respondent described that, from the Hamas point of view the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, the ultimate aim. Interestingly, the informant B seemed to extend the scope of the description regarding this topic. The shared point was that it is in Hamas' interests that Palestinian factions to unite peacefully without disputes and internal conflicts. The communications between Fatah and Hamas are continuous and have on several occasions reached an understanding to end all forms of internal violence, (Informant, B).

Taken together, these findings from these three respondents underline the central idea of Hamas that the attainments of the national interest of the Palestinians should not be compromised. This is the main gate to reach a formula and a national project that tends to meet all the political forces and handles all the conflicts with the occupation. These findings match those observed in earlier studies that the Palestinian national interest should be given much attention (Saleh, 2014; Abu-Helal, 2014). In this respect, no wonder that Hamas is consistent to work with political strategies to fit the fluctuating realities in order to fit the desires of the Palestinians. In fair description it is not difficult from the findings to note that the life lived experiences of Hamas and its supports are far from the suspicious distortion of many writers against the essence of the attaining the agenda of the Hamas.

From this description, one could see the hard work of love, commitments and passions that Hamas has succeeded to share with Palestinians. From this understanding it can simply reads that talking about the Palestinian national interest is equal to the defense of the interests of the Palestinian people. This finding has an important implication to our understanding that Hamas is aware with the Palestinian peoples' interests both at the national and international levels. From such level of awareness, Hamas believes that Palestinian interests ultimately are the things of the valuable importance that count. These findings confirm earlier findings by (Saleh, 2014; Hamdan, 2013) that Hamas has its clear mission consistent to the desires of the Palestinians.

The paper found that Hamas' vision on Palestine's national interests was based on the interests of the Palestinians, which centered on their fundamental rights and the right to claim their land that has been occupied by the Zionist. On this note, understanding the foreign policy of Hamas can never be overemphasized without understanding their vision on the Palestinians' national interests. This is because Hamas is a political movement established to protect the Palestinian national interests.

For Hamas Palestinian national interest means free from occupation, resistance and external domination and this statement can be found in the Hamas Charter (Charter, 1988). For example, Article 11 declares that Hamas honours Nationalism (*Wataniyya*) as part of the religious duties. Nothing is deeper in nationalism than waging jihad against the enemy and opposing them when they set foot on the land of the Muslims. Also, Article 10 of the Charter states that the Islamic Resistance Movement, while charting its own course, will do its utmost best to constitute support to the weak and defend all the oppressed simultaneously. Muslih (1999) adds that even though the movement seems aspiring on the ideological level to Islamic principles, it also derived its strength from specific contexts of the Palestinian nationalism. The findings also confirmed previous observations by Abu-Helal (2014) and Mish'al (2012) that the national interests in Hamas' vision were anything. This is the considerable level of awareness that is shared by this respondent. One meaning is that Hamas is aware of its context and its readiness to capitalize on available opportunities to provide extensive community services and responding to the political reality consistent to the expectation of Palestinian cannot be compromised.

In a study by Bondokji (2013), Hamas was shown to have become the main Palestinian actor when it won the Palestinian democratic legislative elections in 2006 and, in recent years, went from holding a religious ideology to becoming a nationalist movement that focused on national rights. Another study by Hroub (2005) reports that Hamas' traditional projections of itself as an uncompromising resistance movement the popularity is derived from its resistance to the Israeli occupation. This is in addition to strengthening and defending the Palestinian national unity among other priorities of its national interest. Objectively, it can be reasoned that there

is a distinct difference between how Hamas whose core interests is that of capitalizing on available opportunities to protect Palestinian national interests and how the critics who are blind and do not hold this conviction writes about this movement. However, its vision of the national interests differed from Fatah's stance in the sense that Hamas focused on the Umma (people) first before any other things (Alshaer, 2009; Tamimi, 2007; Halliday, 2002) while Fatah considered its party manifest as the main focus (Deane, 2009).

6. The Main Principles of Hamas Foreign Policy

Therefore, any government, party, or movement has its certain regularities that guide its existence. Although these principles vary from one government to another, most of them do have principles (Levitt, 2008). In regards to the principle of Hamas that shape and determine the regime's foreign policy, and from the information obtained from the informants, the paper finds that the real principle of Hamas is derived from the Islam religion based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, where anything apart from these Islamic principles were considered partially in the movement's action. The movement identified the following as the major principles in pursuing and protecting the national interest of the Palestinians and its foreign policy objectives [see Fig.2]:

6.1 Islamic Ethics and Controls

Islamic values and principles were the main ethics of the movement and its tenets were based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah in guiding its political and economic activities. Informant E views Islamic ethics and precepts of the Hamas movement as follows:

Hamas, in all its political performance, remained based on the ethics and Islamic tenets that govern the movement's performance and its relations, and the movement succeeded in carving a new experience in the construction and management of its political relations, dealing in reality with all its components, and with the needs of the political work and its details (Informant, E).

Similarly, another informant is of the opinion that the principles of Hamas depended on the Islamic ideologies and objectives of the movement:

Hamas is constantly associated as an Islamist movement that takes the Islamic doctrine, behavior and way of life as the mind of the movement and, therefore, jihad is the line and basic right for her for the Liberation of Palestine. Hamas understands that political performance is at the origin of the idea of serving the people, unless it is opposed by the Sharia. I prefer the term high dynamic than pragmatic to document the reality of this focus, (Informant, D).

Based on these two respondents it is obvious that faith on Islamic views of ethics is something that cannot be negotiated. One meaning is that, throughout the course of the Hamas practices, the necessity of realizing its political and economic activities is done without being so contradictory or inconsistent with the system value of Islamic ethics and precepts. Quite understandably, this finding communicate intellectual and spiritual paradigm shift, contrary to what the critics attempts to mislead.

6.2 The Strategic Visions

This is another principle established and adopted by the Hamas government in achieving the national interests and foreign policy. It includes the strategic political, economic and military plans, which address the movement's goal. For instance, one of the informants notes that Hamas had a clear vision on its strategies and goals: "Hamas movement's relations are based on a strategic vision for political action with clear goals progress and strategic, which are derived from the liberalization strategy". Other informant A viewed that: "Military struggle and smart diplomacy are two essential aspects of a sound Palestinian strategy and Hamas used to have strong strategic relations".

In light of the fulfilment of a clear strategic vision and support of the liberation, the findings show that Hamas had a set of principles in its domestic and international relations too. The focus behind is to serve its strategy. For instance, informant D explained: "The movement has a strategic vision as a principle because the overriding goal is to get rid of the occupation. In an extended version respondent E shared the experience that shows Hamas ability to work with the government and other institutions in protecting the interest of the people. The respondent E shared that it is important to note that aside the main principle Hamas portrays the ability to maintain cardinal relations. He perceives that Hamas practiced the principle of maintaining relationships within the Palestine institutions: It is encouraging to note that the said Hamas's policy principle is aware of the importance of having good relationship from the grassroots. The key point here is that what is required for the successful movement is among other things to do more. In another development, informant B further emphasised that strengthening and expansions were also part of Hamas' policies. This means that Hamas is also aware with the need to expand its policies in order to win support of other countries in the context of external political relations. This respondent shared that: "Although the results of the Russia visit were positive and we achieved our goals in terms of penetrating the international arena through a major country and a member of the UN Security Council, Russia is also a member of the Quartet and has a long history in the region". One meaning is

that in realizing its broad goal, a movement leaders as for its supporters are duty bound to demonstrate strategic tractability in the organizational approach to governance. Elsewhere, Respondent D puts that: " Hamas has opened doors and gates to Turkey and the Gulf states, received in Egypt, and likewise visited Iran and went to Russia". These findings have important implication to our understanding of the centrality to the sense of togetherness as shared by Palestinians in the midst of the present challenging moments. From the said views a point can be made that people needs organizational or movements' policy that encourage both leaders and followers to look up to working with others without compromising the key goals. One reason of this kind of thinking can probably be related to the extra ordinary quality of leaders to have great vision and being active in implementing the said version. It can be reasoned that competence and dedication are required both in theory and practice of the movement.

6.3 The Independence of Decisions

Decisions in Hamas were very important and independent with regards to its political activities and, in order to achieve political and economic sphere for its people, Hamas preserved its tradition and maintained its principle of not joining any groups or parties. Informant E is of the notion that in the context of the political relations, the movement has always been keen on the independence of its decision despite belonging to the nation, with the affiliation of the nation, and rejects any dependency on any of the other political relations. Accordingly, informant A adds that it is the movement's independence and the decision not to allow the intervention of states to influence its decisions either in convergence or divergence with States but to the extent of supporting, and assigning to, the cause of the Palestinian people. The description here is that when Israel asked Fatah to put pressure on Hamas, Hamas retaliated by going against the Israeli occupation as Hamas' principle was that Palestinian blood is a red line [See Fig.3]. Informant D also commented that: " Hamas responds to pressure situations in accordance with the estimated interests of that particular circumstance".

6.4 Supporting of the Resistance

Towards Resisting the occupation became one of the foremost major principles of Hamas and the Palestinians in defending their homeland, culture, politics, and socio-economic activities from external dominations. The Palestinians believe that the only means to fight against their enemy or any other external domination or occupation is by resistance. The Palestinians view the Zionist as their number one enemy that causes them suffering in present days, and the only way to prevent that is through resistance as stated by informant E "...the only enemy of the Palestinian people and the forces of resistance, including Hamas, is the Zionist entity that stems animosity towards it from occupying Palestinian lands and usurping the rights of the Palestinian people. Hamas, therefore, has no problem in dealing with any regional or international parties, except for the A party, who occupied Palestinian territories, destroyed Palestinian lives and displaced Palestinian refugees, (Informant, E).

However, it is important to note that based on the views of informant E, the struggle against the occupation through armed resistance remained the only means in achieving the political ends. Hamas has been true to its principles and true to the resistance and there is no change in its permanent positions (i.e. non-recognition of Israel's right to exist)...The basic guidelines of the Hamas government do not contradict the principles of the Palestinian people and the resistance is even the main element in those basic guidelines. As far as we're concerned, the issue of recognizing Israel has been settled once and for all. It has been settled in our political literature, in our Islamic thoughts and in our Jihadist cultures, on which we based our moves. Recognition of Israel is out of the question. We have been advocating the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of the refugees. In exchange for all that, we will declare a truce but no recognition of Israel. We will never recognize the usurper Zionist government and will continue our jihad-like movement until the liberation of Jerusalem, (Informant, B).

Consequently, Hamas electoral platform document of the Change and Reform (2007), which indicates that, "we have to exploit all our energy to support the resistance of our people and to provide all abilities to end occupation and establishing the Palestinian state whose Jerusalem is its capital" also Hamas Charter Article No.15 states that "the jihad to liberate 'Palestine' is the personal duty of every Muslim". This articles has shown the commitment made by Hamas in providing solution the Palestinians problem through different means. It is base on this that, Rudolph and Van Engeland (2013), stated that one of Hamas domestic policies is unity through dialogue which is the only accepted way to solve domestic disputes, and prohibiting internecine violence as Palestinian blood prohibited.

6.5 Protecting the Interests

The word interest connotes the desire of achieving a particular thing within a specified period. Interests in the dimension of Hamas principle depicted the clear objectives of the movement put in place to be achieved. Informant E argues that the fundamental interests in Hamas's political relations are always based on the interests

of the Palestinian people and their cause, and regardless of the nature of the available political relations and opportunities that may sometimes seem attractive. Therefore, Hamas's political relations do not interfere with, or adversely affect, the national interests of the Palestinian people and their cause, (Informant, E). Informant A also states that the interest of the movement was to establish a strong government by forming a coalition cabinet to protect the Palestinian national interests. Consequently, from the previous quotations, it could be interpreted that Hamas viewed the Palestinian rights as the basic and most fundamentals before any other things. As such, the principle of “openness on the basis of supporting the Palestinian national rights” was given much priority than any other matter because Palestinians, like any other human beings on earth, deserve their rights and this point of view remained as the protected national interest.

For its part, the Palestinian government and the Palestinian factions in Gaza Strip affirmed their support for the right of the Palestinian people to express their devotion to the right of return with all possible means. This was essentially executed on the ground where ministers, deputies in the Palestinian Legislative Council and leaders of all factions in the Gaza Strip were at the forefront of the marches which headed to the borders with Palestine occupied in 1948. This position is based on these forces’ belief in the need to build on the popular movements and the “Arab uprisings” to launch Palestinian popular events. These events would be a way for the Palestinians’ right to take control, declare their adherence to the right of return and insist on achieving it.

The prisoner exchange deal (the Faithfulness of Freeman Deal) is deliberated a great national accomplishment; in spite of the fact that it did not fulfil all of Hamas’ conditions and demands. However, it succeeded in raising Hamas’ reputation in that it is considered once again a crucial party in the Palestinian arena. Therefore, such is vital to deal with it as a tough player that has influence on shaping the general path of the Palestinian issue. In spite of the significance of the above, the direct merit of the deal is that it owes its success to armed resistance. The prisoner exchange was an offspring of the resistance and a product of its sacrifices. Therefore, the Palestinian people who came out in the middle of March 2011 and said: ‘the people want to liberate the prisoners’ were as if placing their ballot papers in the armed resistance boxes. They considered the resistance their only credible path, able to achieve the task of freeing the prisoners and detainees, especially those serving long sentences and are the Palestinian factions’ leaders and cadres, the elite of the Palestinian people. Continuing from this fact, we can say that the choice of armed resistance is once again weakly at the forefront. The people are rallying round it since it has assumed a nationalistic strategy. What heightened this result is the failure of the peace settlement talks to free detainees, and the prisoners specially the leaders and cadres serving long sentences. The exchange deal has once again declared two essential matters about Hamas: first, that it is a key in persuading events in the political arena and in managing the national path. While the second, the legitimacy of armed resistance in any impending national working program.

6.6 Non-Interference

Non-interference is part of Hamas’ principles. “The Movement is committed to the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of States under any circumstance,” (Informant, E). The first thing to understand here is that, in order for the movement to act at the international level, the movement must choose to be neutral and position itself as a non-interfering group: Non-interference in the affairs of states, whatsoever the reason may be, and maintaining the movement’s independence by not allowing the intervention of states to influence its decisions, either in convergence or divergence with the States, are on the extent of supporting and assigning the cause of the Palestinian people, (Informant, A).

More so, most of the informants responded that Hamas had succeeded in building relations with the countries of the region that it contributed to the growth in political presence. Through such relations, Hamas presented a positive image of political reliability and independence and managed to cope with some political and security crises with some of these countries. This finding was in line with Al-Khazendar (2009); Harub (2000) that Hamas has succeeded in becoming a main actor in the regional and international political actions towards the region. Furthermore, the movement succeeded in presenting both clear “vision and strategic policies”.

7. Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to explore foreign policy of the Hamas Palestinian government. One of the more significant findings from this study is related to Hamas’ ideology and principle of nationalism being the top secret of its success at the international level. This paper has argued that Hamas is a movement that struggles to protect the right and interest of Palestine’s citizens at the international level. It was also shown that the principles of Hamas support and protect Palestinian’s national interests. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that resistance against occupation by the Zionist through liberation remained as the only means towards the desired self-national interests. Taken together, the evidences from this study suggest that Hamas is adamant to non-recognition of the Zionist occupation and the Quartet agreement’s conditions.

The paper found that the Hamas perceived the Palestinians’ national interest as the liberation of the land through the adoption of arm resistance. Hence, Hamas played a more significant role in protecting Palestine’s

national interest than their rival party Fatah because Fatah had completely lost the aim of Palestine's national interest (Friedman, 2008). This gave an upper hand to Hamas to rule and control the PLO.

The principles of Hamas supported and protected the Palestinian's national interests. This was clearly evident in its principle of strength and expansion of communal relations to serve the Palestinian cause and sincerity in supporting the Palestinian national rights. On the issue of resistance against the occupation, it appeared from the analysis of Hamas' foreign policy that resistance remained the only means to resist the occupation though it was one of the several approaches for liberation. This arose in the context of Hamas steadfastly confirming their non-recognition of the occupation and the Quartet agreement's conditions that lent legitimacy to the Israeli occupation.

From the views put forward from previous studies and findings of this paper, all have directed to the same inferences. This means that the results found in this study are similar to the speech of the leader of Hamas, the government electoral platform, and even the Hamas Charter since 1987 to date, as nothing has changed in the political thought and practice of Hamas. This further validates the result of this study and concurrently substantiates the findings of the paper as solid and important so as to reflect the Hamas movement's power. These findings are consistent with those of other studies and suggest that Hamas as serious movement to sustain and protect Palestinian interests has taken into account the centrality of sound strategic analysis in realizing its goals. Precisely, both respondents seem to express the same fundamental truth of what is Hamas in its comprehensive model of operation. The findings further support previous studies and reviewed works (Abu-Helal, 2014; Lovlie and Knudsen, 2013; Zweiri, 2006).

References

- Abu-Amr, Z. (1993), "Hamas: a historical and political background". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 5-19.
- Abu-Amr, Z. (2007), "Hamas: from opposition to rule", *Where Now For Palestine*, 167-187.
- Abu-Helal, F. (2014), "*Ada' al-hukumat al-filastinia*" [Performance of the Palestinian Governments: 2003–2013] a refereed study that will be published in the new Arabic book of al-Zaytouna "The Palestinian National Authority: A Study of the Experience and Performance 1994-2013".
- Al-Ayyam, (2007, September 5), *Al-Ayyam Newspaper*.
- Al-Kaddoumi, F. (2014, April 10), "Resistance: The road to restoring the rights of the Palestinian people", Retrieved from <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/articles/middle-east/10815-resistance-the-road-to-restoring-the-rights-of-the-palestinian-people>.
- Al-Khazendar, S. (2009), "Political Islam movements and international relations: The Concept and the practice". *European University Institute*.
- Alshaer, A. (2009), "The poetry of Hamas". *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 2(2), 214.
- Assabeel, (2010, September 3), *Assabeel Newspaper*.
- Barsky, Y., & Committee, A. J. (2006), "Hamas: The Islamic resistance movement of Palestine". *American Jewish Committee*.
- Beasley, R. K., & Kaarbo, J. (2012), "Foreign policy in comparative perspective: Domestic and international influences on state behavior". *Cq Press*.
- Bondokji, N. (2013), "Hamas: Social identity, violent resistance and power politics". *Manak Publications*.
- Brown, N. J. (2012), "Gaza Five Years On: Hamas Settles In". Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Carroll, W. (2005). *Hamas and the Arab State: A transnational terrorist social movement's impact on regimes in the middle east*.
- Charter, H. (1988), "The charter of Allah: The Platform of the Islamic resistance movement".
- Deane, S. (2009), "Instituting Peace: Third party principles and the Mitchell effect". *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 3(1), 65-91.
- El-Hamad, J. & Al-Bargothi, E. (2010), "*Derassa fi fikr harakat al-moqawamah al-islameyya Hamas* [A Study in the Political Ideology of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas 1987–1996]" (4th ed.). Amman: Middle East Study Centre.
- Felesteen, (2011, June 23), *Felesteen Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.felesteen.ps/details/21531/htm>.
- Friedman, G. (2008), "Strategic deficiencies in national liberation struggles: The case of Fatah in the al-Aqsa Intifada". *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31(1), 41-67.
- Gunning, J. (2004), "Peace with Hamas? The transforming potential of political participation". *International Affairs*, 80(2), 233-255.
- Halliday, F. (2002), "The politics of the umma: states and community in Islamic movements". *Mediterranean Politics*, 7(3), 20-41.
- Hamdan, O. (2013), "*Roiiyet harakat al-muqawamat al-islamia (Hamas) wa azmat al mashrue al-watani al filastini* [Vision of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) for the crisis of the Palestinian national project]". Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations.

- Haniyyah, I. (2014), "*Hamas qeraa'a fi al-rruya wa tajrubat al-hukm* [Hamis: an overview of it Vision and Experience in Power]". Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations.
- Hroub, K. (2000), "Hamis Political thought and practice". Washington DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Hroub, K. (2005), "Is Hamas Planning the Inconceivable?". *The palestinian initiative for the promotion of global dialogue and democracy*.
- Hroub, K. (2006), "A new Hamas through its new documents". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 35(4), 6-27.
- Hroub, K. (2007), "Hamis: A beginner's guide". Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.
- Hroub, K. (2009), Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisi. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 33(4), 21-38.
- Joshi, V. P., & Srivastava, L. S. (2005), "International relations from 1914 to presentday". Krishna Prakashan Media (p) Ltd.
- Khalidi, R. (2007), "The iron cage: The story of the Palestinian struggle for statehood". *Beacon Press*.
- Khalidi, W. (1991), "The Palestine problem: An overview". *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 5 16.
- Levitt, M. (2008), "Hamis: Politics, charity, and terrorism in the service of jihad". *Yale University Press*.
- Lovlie, F., & Knudsen, A. (2013), "Hamis and the Arab spring: Introduction". *Middle East Policy*, 20(3), 56-59.
- Ma'an, (2007), *Ma'an Newspaper*.
- Manna', A. (2013), "The Palestinian Nakba and its continuous repercussions". *Israel Studies*, 18(2), 86-99.
- Milton-Edwards, B., & Farrell, S. (2010), "Hamis: The Islamic Resistance Movement". *Cambridge: Polity*.
- Mish'al, K. (2012), "Hamis Political Thought and Stances in Light of the Arab Uprisings". *Al Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations*. Retrieved from <http://www.alzaytouna.net/en/conferences-and-seminars/151556-an-important-document-by-khalid-mish%E2%80%98al%3A-hamis-political-thought-and-stances-in-light-of-the-arab-uprisings.html>.
- Muslih, M. Y. (1999), "The Foreign Policy of Hamas". Council on Foreign Relations.
- Nye, J. S., & Keohane, R. O. (1971), "Transnational relations and world politics: An introduction". *International Organization*, 25(03), 329-349.
- PIC, (2009, July 12), *PIC Newspaper*.
- Pina, A. D. (2006, February), "Palestinian elections". *Library Of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service*.
- Rizqa, Y. (2014), "*Al-rruya al-siyasiya li harakat Hamas* [Hamis's Political Vision]". *Al Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations*.
- Rudolph, M. R. M., & Van Engeland, A. (2013), "From terrorism to politics". *Ashgate Publishing, Ltd*.
- Saleh M. (2013), "*Azmat al-mashrue al-watani al-filastini wal-afaq al-muhtamala* [The Crisis of the Palestinian National Project and its Prospects]". *Al Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations*.
- Saleh, M. (2014), "The Palestinian Issue: Historical Background and Contemporary Developments" (1st ed.). *Al Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations*.
- Scham, P., & Abu Irshaid, O. (2009), "Hamis: Ideological Rigidity and Political Flexibility", *US Institute of Peace Special Report 224*, Washington, DC: USIP. Available online at: <http://www.usip.org/publications/hamis-ideological-rigidity-and-political-flexibility>
- Tamimi, A. (2007), "Hamis: A history from within". *Interlink Books*.
- Zuhur, S. (2008), "Hamis and Israel: Conflicting strategies of group based politics". *DTIC Document*.
- Zweiri, M. (2006), "The Hamas victory: Shifting sands or major earthquake?". *Third World Quarterly*, 27(4), 675-687.

Abeer Abdullah Alsarhi was born in Gaza in the year 1982. She is a Doctoral candidate, Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science from Islamic University, Gaza, Palestine in 2005. She received her Master's Degree in Computer Science from Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2010.

Prof.Dr.Zaid Bin Ahmad Professor of Philosophy and Civilization Studies, Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia.

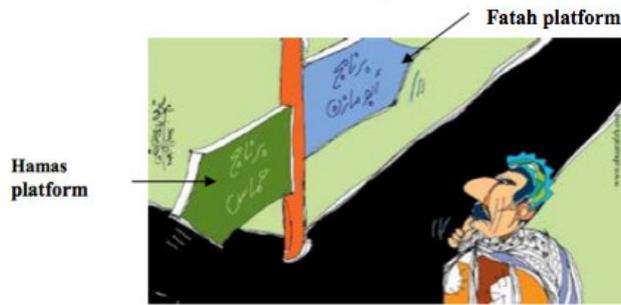


Figure 1. Two different visions and paths (resistance and peace settlement)
(Source: Al-Quds, 2006).

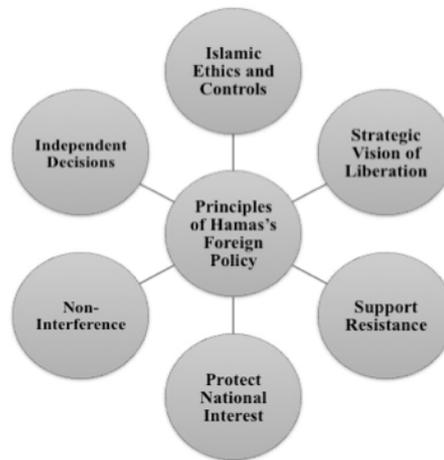


Figure 2. The Main Principles of Hamas Foreign Policy

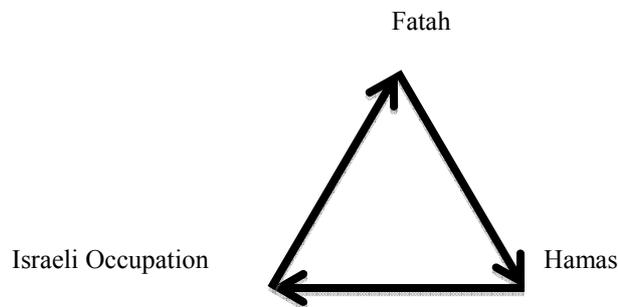


Figure 3. Triangle Base in Hamas Response