

# The Future Roadmap for the Relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas Movement

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**Abstract:** The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement varies according to the nature of Iranian and Hamas behaviour when dealing with regional events in particular. Sometimes we can see the relationship between the two sides warm when events occur inside Palestinian territories, and sometimes we see normal relations between the two parties in the case of temporary stability inside the Palestinian territories. Sometimes there is a bad relationship between Iran and Hamas, especially when it comes to regional events in the Middle East. The methodology was based on Iranian-Hamas behaviour toward the events in the Middle East and has been used to try to predict the future relationship between both sides. Through the principle of predictability in international relations, this article argues the options related to the relationship between Iran and Hamas especially with regard to their mutual interest, and the impact of these options on the way Iran will deal with the Palestinian issues.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran has helped the Palestinian Hamas movement since the establishment of Hamas in Palestinian territories. There was a political vision shared by the two sides on issues related to the Palestinian regional and international situation, but with the beginning of the Arab Spring revolutions, especially in the Syrian Arab Republic, the relationship between Iran and Hamas began to be affected by political positions not agreed upon by the two parties. This led to the emergence of fundamental differences between Iran and Hamas at the regional and Arab levels, which in turn alerted the Palestinian Hamas movement to the nature of Iranian behaviour in the region of the Middle East and why Iran is interested in the Palestinian cause.

The emergence of the axis of resistance as the axis of the Shiite community raised the alarm of the Palestinian Hamas movement, in addition to the presence of another axis - the axis of moderation, namely Arab-style Sunni's led by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. This also had an impact on the Palestinian Hamas movement, through attempts by the countries of the axis of Arab moderation to attract movement. Hamas is trying to balance all parties

willing to help the Palestinian people achieve the goal of establishing a Palestinian state.

There are specific determinants for both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement. Both parties are trying to achieve their objectives based on these determinants and are trying to find the parameters agreed upon by the two parties to achieve their common objectives, whether locally, regionally or internationally. Iranian and Hamas behavior toward the common determinants and the work to achieve them is complex; therefore the article has presented a clear explanation for the common interests and their impact on the Palestinian issue (Thomson, 2017).

## 2 DETERMINANTS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE PALESTINIAN HAMAS MOVEMENT

Based on the ideological determinants, the political determinants of Hamas are defined at the external level and can be summarized in several points:

- The Israeli occupation is the only enemy of the Palestinian people and its resistance forces,

including Hamas. Its hostility stems from the fact that it occupies Palestinian territories and violates the rights of the Palestinian people. The movement therefore has no problem in dealing with any regional or international party. Israel has occupied Palestinian territories and destroyed Palestinian life, causing the displacement of refugees. Hamas are welcoming any support or help to end the occupation and to achieve the concept of the Palestinian state.

- The Palestinian Hamas movement has committed itself to a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries under any circumstances, especially in light of the Arab revolutions that began in 2011.
- The Palestinian Hamas movement has built its relations at both the public and official levels, in a way that maintains its relationship with the state and its institutions. It has established relations at the grassroots level in recognition of the importance of popular relations.
- The Palestinian Hamas movement operates only in the occupied territories and is directly present against the occupation of the land of Palestine. Hamas does not exercise military action against any state or territory of any state. This policy has led to the awareness of all regional and international parties that resistance action against the occupation is not an act of futility or an abstract desire to fight. Rather, it is the performance of a national struggle against an occupier to achieve the political goal of establishing a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.
- The Palestinian Hamas movement welcomes any assistance or support in the face of Israeli occupation from any Arab, Islamic or foreign country provided that it does not intervene in internal Palestinian affairs and that the support is unconditional.
- The Palestinian Hamas movement balances its foreign policy in relations with all countries, whether they are Arab, Islamic or international, so as to balance with all members of the international community and to deliver the idea of legitimate resistance against the Israeli occupation to the whole world.
- At the Arab and Islamic levels, the Palestinian Hamas movement is trying to unify the Arab and Islamic ranks to confront the Israeli occupation by supporting the Palestinian people and by resisting the Israeli occupation in all forms of peaceful resistance, both popular

and even armed, as well as boycotting Israeli goods at the Arab and Islamic levels.

### **3 DETERMINANTS OF THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN**

#### **3.1 Religious and Geographical Determinants**

The Islamic revolution in Iran was based on the religious authority in place. Religion has a prominent role in guiding foreign policy as well as a strong role in the social and cultural structure of Iranian society. Khomeini considers that the best government is an Islamic government. This credit is due to several basic considerations identified in his book, entitled 'Islamic government'. Regarding the application of the provisions of Islam at all areas and levels, the second consideration concerns the unification of Muslims and their liberation from colonialism. On this meaning, Khomeini has said that 'we do not have the means to unify the Islamic nation and to liberate its lands from the hands of the colonists, except through the establishment of our Islamic government' (Khomeini, 1970).

The Iranian revolution has made political actions linked to the attitudes of the clergy, who doubt this dependence as a source of religious authority deprived of any role in the political power of the country. Pre-revolutionary clerics were reluctant and inclined to distance themselves from political action. Khomeini's book, 'Wilayat al Faqih', encouraged the clerics to present Islam to the people in its true form and to link Islam to all forms of life, including political life. The slogan of the separation of religion from politics and the demands of Islamic scholars not to interfere in political and social affairs was spread by colonialism (Zuwairi, 2015).

There are many voices in Iran that believe that the Wilayat al Faqih must be given absolute authority, up to the point of granting legitimacy to the entire system, which is derived from a singular leader. Moussa Ardebili stated that we must mention that the government, the Shura Council and the government officials are all, in fact, under the authority of the Wilayat al Faqih. From him comes all orders and no one shall do any action contrary to his will (ALsayed, 2016).

According to the Iranian constitution, the supreme leader of Iran is the supreme leader of the country, and above his post is the head of the country itself.

Some have even likened the president of Iran to the prime minister or an actual president. This is in accordance with the theory of "Wali al-Faqih", adopted by Iran by Khomeini after his revolution, which ended the regime of the Shah in 1979. He devised a system of government not seen in the world before, declaring clearly and through the constitution that it aims to apply this system to all countries. Said countries will be controlled under the name of "Islamic Jihad" and the "Unification of the Nation" (Amoun, 2016).

The geographical location of the Islamic Republic of Iran is important, both politically and economically in nature, as it links East Asia and West Asia, with borders overlooking the Arabian Gulf as well as its proximity to Arab countries including Iraq, Syria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

There are two major geographic regions that are the focus of Iranian interest; the first is the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, located in northern Iran and the second consists of the Gulf States, located to the south. The importance of these areas for Iran is because of the cultural heritage that they possess, which is represented in the Shiite doctrine, and in the economic wealth that is found in the reserves of oil and natural gas (Awaid, 2014).

### 3.2 Economic Determinant

Economic self-sufficiency means that the state has reached a stage where it does not have to extend a request for help to rich countries in order to obtain financial or in-kind assistance such as weapons, aircraft etc. Thus therein is the ability of the political system to withstand, through local production and self-sufficiency, to produce political power in the international community by making independent decisions without any effect regionally or internationally. The imbalance in this leads the state to a cage of dependence abroad, pushing it to making political and security concessions, which threatens the existence of the state and independent sovereignty.

This is what Iran is aware of. Energy is an important element in calculating the power of the state at the internal and external levels. It must work seriously to provide the potential energy for life and economic development, and to find other sources of petroleum energy. Iran's development of a nuclear program is one manifestation of this realization. Iran has been able to achieve some scientific achievements in this regard. It successfully enriched uranium using centrifuges.

The Iranian nuclear file is one of the most important priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the internal and external levels, especially with regard to the axis of resistance. With the increase of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the result is that it is seeking to increase Iran's political power in the regional arena. This gives strong impetus to the Palestinian Hamas movement in the face of the Israeli occupation. Mahmoud al-Zahar, the Hamas leader closest to Iran, said that his movement was stronger than during the recent Israeli war on the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2014. Zahar added that the Palestinian people would not be broken and that they would continue to resist the Zionist occupation until the liberation of all of Palestine. Zahar leads the wing, whose relationship with Iran has not dissipated even at the height of the confusion over Hamas' position on the Syrian war, when the movement announced a stand against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Iran's ally. Its offices were closed in Damascus and moved to Qatar (Middle East Online, 2015).

### 3.3 Security and Political Determinants

Iran has adopted a revolutionary foreign policy since 1979, when the ruling class at the time had a vision of the outside world reflected in its foreign policy. This vision was carried out with a view of international isolation and a negative view of Iran. However, by the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, Iran seemed to be more realistic in its foreign policy, especially with the rise in real trends. As a result, Iran sought to restructure its regional and international relations while retaining its strategic powers. It moved from the revolutionary role of Khomeini to a more balanced role in international relations as the pillar of internal revolutionary support, focusing on peaceful diplomacy and balance in its foreign relations. Solid and soft power, away from sensitivities, in order to rebuild what was destroyed by the Iraq-Iran war. Nevertheless, neighbouring countries have continued to meet every Iranian policy with a look of extreme suspicion and caution.

This turbulent environment has made Iran acquire the idea of targeting it militarily in the context of what Washington calls the axis of evil. Iran is still in its regional and international relations with deep mistrust. Fifteen neighbours face a tension that makes Iran and its regional and international actors be in permanent doubt. This will certainly be reflected in the effectiveness of Iran's foreign policy, which is considered to be a relative failure of its overall policy. Iran continues to feel that it is targeted from both near and far. This is reflected in its vision of the world,

which prevents a positive and constructive interaction, which has negative repercussions on its foreign policy system. The isolation and the threat against Tehran has made Iran's political thinking based on the potential of a plot, which is perhaps the driving force behind the attempt to acquire nuclear weapons (Estuer, 2016).

On the basis of this, the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was built through several factors in the Middle East. The problem here is that the Islamic Republic of Iran is not the only player in the Middle East where other major countries exist with their military bases, be they American or Russian. It complicates the understanding of Iranian foreign policy, but as we explained earlier, the ideological determinant is the basis of Iran's political system, leading to the creation of Iran's foreign policy based on the same foundation.

### 3.4 The Future Roadmap for Iran-Hamas Relations

According to the regional events that took place in the Middle East, whether in Egypt, Syria or Yemen, the positions of the Palestinian Hamas movement and the Islamic Republic of Iran were not completely identical. This indicates the independence of the Hamas decision from any foreign intervention, even if it is an ally and headed by the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is problematic as we mentioned earlier, regarding the Iranian reaction to the decisions of the Palestinian Hamas movement.

Hassan Ahmadian, an Iranian scholar, predicted that Hamas's options for dealing with regional events would be very limited. The Hamas leadership learned that the rhetoric and philosophy of the resistance did not conform to the priorities of the Gulf States - Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - in the region. It is clear that Iran has continued its rhetoric and policies in support of the movements that adopt armed resistance. Hence, Iran's options are limited in its relations with Hamas (Ahmadian, 2015).

The Iranian researcher predicted that the options of Hamas place them between the return of Hamas to the incubator of regional resistance and to the axis of resistance led by the Islamic Republic in Iran. The second option is the continuation of Hamas in betting on the replacement of Iran and its allies with other players in the Gulf. According to the Iranian researcher, the first option is the return of Hamas to the axis of resistance, where he stressed that there are indications of the weighting of this option by some leaders of Hamas. Hamas's anti-Syrian rhetoric has

declined, and Hamas has rejected US military interventions against the Syrian regime.

If Hamas is likely to deal with regional changes, then it will have to raise the sectarian dimension that entered its speech after the Arab Spring and to return to emphasizing the initial discourse in resisting the Israeli occupation. It is clear that such an option would exclude some of the leaders who have committed the great strategic error that brought Hamas into the regional equations that were indispensable, a mistake that played down Hamas both at home and abroad. Tehran will accept this return and will understand that Hamas is distancing itself from the Syrian crisis and its neutrality towards its players, and will continue to support Hamas.

The second option is the continuation of Hamas in betting on replacing Iran and its allies with other players in the Gulf. It is clear that these countries do not adopt the philosophy of the particular resistance rhetoric or policy that is aligned to the Palestinian cause. If this option is weighted, then Hamas will have to move gradually away from the resistance and enter the cycle of negotiations that Fatah has entered before and end its control over the Palestinian decisions.

Hamas will increase the strength and voice of the other resistance movements that will grow at the expense of Hamas and steal the leadership position of Hamas in the Palestinian resistance, just as happened to the Fatah movement after offering the option of resistance.

Hamas is expected to split into its respective military and political wings. In this case, the gap will be between Iran and its allies on the one hand and Hamas on the other. Hamas will lose its unconditional Iranian support, according to Mahmoud al-Zahar, and in order to receive conditional support, it would lose its independence and drag it into Fatah movement.

The third option is to continue with the oscillation between the two options. In this case, the regional and internal pressure on Hamas will increase, and the disgruntled public tone of Hamas' lack of resources to manage the sector will grow.

The researcher believes that the first option could be a future road map for the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement by focusing on the Palestinian issue without entering into regional problems. Iranian support must be without political conditions for Hamas. On the other hand, Hamas is trying to activate the relationship with the Gulf States without going into the political problems between the Gulf States and Iran.

In a report issued by the Zaytouna Center for Political Studies in 2014 on the future of the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement (Farhana, 2014), the report touched on points of disagreement and agreement at the regional level between the two sides through several key points. The most prominent areas of agreement and cooperation between Iran and Hamas, according to the Zaytouna Centre report were:

- The position of the Israeli occupation, the complete liberation of Palestine and the recognition of "Israel".
- For Iran, Hamas is a Sunni lever and a counterbalance to Tehran in regional geopolitics. Palestine has a central Arab and Islamic status, thus strengthening Iran's regional standing in the region.
- Iran's relationship with Hamas softens the sectarian colour of Iran's regional role, according to a wide spectrum of stakeholders and audiences in the region. On the other hand, Tehran is an important regional support base for Hamas, especially in terms of logistical support for the resistance.
- The intersection of the relationship between Tehran, Damascus, Hamas, Hezbollah and Islamic Jihad has, for years, been an impetus for the resistance program and created a regional backing for its course.

#### 4 AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES

- The difference in sectarian colour, and their inability to overcome it, in light of the atmosphere of the existing sectarian mobilization, and their inability to develop the relationship in a similar alliance because of it.
- The sensitivity of the region, its peoples and their political systems to the Iranian role and its project in the region, as Hamas finds its strategic (especially popular) backbone in the same regional space.
- The independence of Hamas and its rejection of the territorial subordination of any parties; in return, there is a desire for the hegemony inherent in a number of decision makers in Iran.
- Hamas's sensitivity to its involvement in regional alliances, contrasting with its strategic vision. There is also Tehran's desire to develop the relationship into something similar to

building a homogenous bloc in a highly coordinated policy.

#### 5 POSSIBLE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP OPTIONS

Based on the political reading of the map of the relationship between Hamas and Iran and its intersections and contradictions, and by trying to draw their support in the current regional scene, the future of the relationship can be estimated as follows:

- *The first option:*  
Relaunching the relationship, including the return of financial and logistical support to Hamas by Tehran.
- *The second option:*  
Blocking of communication between the parties, and the arrival of the relationship between them to a state of total estrangement.
- *Third option:*  
The communication between the two parties stay on the level of "normal" relationship such as relations with some countries in the region.

According to the report, the Zaytouna Centre has stated the future relationship between Iran and Hamas, in view of the need of the parties related to one another, and needing to agree on a package of common interests due to the similar geopolitical location of each in the current regional scene. In view of the contradictions that still exist because of the Syrian crisis and others, as well as because Tehran is under the microscope of the West in the course of talks on the Iranian nuclear file, it is expected that the relationship between the parties will be between options 1 and 3 and any associated influencing factors (Farhana, 2014).

According to the Future Centre for Advanced Research and Studies, the possibility of re-launching the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement is very strong, especially with indications of the return of Iranian-Hamas relations (Future for Advanced Research and Studies, 2017).

- There is an internal political trend led by Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud al-Zahar, which is likely to return to relations with Iran, through the need to build more realistic and realistic relations with central regional powers, including Iran. Hamas must diversify tools at the regional level while not placing all of its

bets on the only ally in the current complex regional environment.

- Visiting a delegation from Hamas to Iran over the past years, whether in 2012 or 2016, especially with the assumptions from Mohamed Morsi's presidency of the Republic in Egypt. The visits show that Hamas was keen to take advantage of the event to move relations forward with Iran through the presence of a new ally of Hamas, Mohamed Mursi, which has strained the relationship between Hamas and Iran, but that did not have a significant negative impact.

Iran is trying to focus once again on the Palestinian issue through its relations with Hamas. Iran's aim is to restore its role in the Palestinian cause, especially since the other regional actors are playing an increasing part, and ensuring that they have a pressure card that they can use when it is necessary to serve their regional interests. Iran wants to strengthen its current and future relations with a big Sunni movement such as Hamas to improve its relations with Arab and Gulf countries and to reduce the Sunni and Arab rejection of Iranian interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

Iran is trying to use Palestinian movements again as a political card against both Israel and the United States, especially since Israel is increasingly highlighting Iran's nuclear file so that more sanctions should be imposed on Iran. That is why Tehran believes it is important to have effective leverage that can be used against Israel to deter it from hostile movements against Iran.

Iran wants to diversify its network of relations within the Palestinian territories. Through the establishment of a new movement in the Palestinian territories to be the reference of this new movement through the Shiite doctrine, the movement of Saber in the Gaza Strip and the Iranian goal of this movement is to alert the Palestinian Hamas movement in the sense that Iran found itself an Iranian follower within the Palestinian territories (the movement of Saber) and working to establish a public base for this new movement. If Hamas movement rejects the Iranian approach in dealing with regional issues, there is another Palestinian party that agrees with this Iranian path.

Tehran is trying to strengthen its relations with Hamas to achieve Iranian goals at the regional level, through the resumption of Iranian aid to Hamas in the financial and military levels. The Iranian regime is trying to tilt the balance in favour of a supportive

political movement within Hamas. The influential trend includes high-level political and military leaders who favor building unique relations with Iran. The Iranian offer is due to Iran's fears that the opposing current is working to find other options, such as having stronger ties with the Arab and Gulf states at the expense of relations with Iran.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

There are regional determinants of the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement. These regional determinants have a significant impact on the nature of the relationship between Iran and Hamas, particularly with regard to the Syrian and Yemeni files

The Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to incite the Palestinian Hamas movement into the regional files. This is what Hamas rejected, which negatively affected the axis of resistance by reducing Iran's political, military and financial support to the Palestinian Hamas movement.

The relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the international community, especially the United States of America, regarding Iran's nuclear file has an impact on the Palestinian Hamas movement, as the international determinants of the relationship between Hamas and Iran are determined by the nature of international engagement with Iran's nuclear file.

The options of dealing with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the international community are complex and difficult given the nature of Iran's behaviour, which is inconsistent with Iranian statements, leading to international and US economic sanctions on Iran and its allies, including the Palestinian Hamas movement.

On the regional level, the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement will be based on the mutual interests between the two parties through the independence of Hamas's political decision stemming from the Palestinian national interest, by focusing on the Palestinian issue and through non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. This contrasts with the behaviour of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it interferes with Iraq, Syria, Yemen and the Gulf region.

At the international level, the options to deal with Iran's nuclear file are stymied by Iran's unclear behaviour. One of the most important options is the military option between the resistance alliance and the US and its allies in the Middle East. This will put

the Palestinian Hamas movement within the axis of resistance. Military action against Iran will be the Palestinian Hamas movement on the side of the Islamic Republic of Iran against the United States and Israel.

Here is something new. Here in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the rest of the Arab and Islamic countries will stand with any military confrontation between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran through the principle of clear Iranian interference in internal Arab affairs, which will impose on Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE Bahrain and a group of other Arab parties the obligation to stand against the Islamic Republic of Iran in any possible war between the US and Iran.

The sectarian mobilization of the Islamic Republic of Iran is negatively affecting the relationship with a Sunni movement, the Palestinian Hamas movement. All of the Islamic Republic's allies are Shiites in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon or Yemen, which is contrary to the Sunni principles of the Palestinian Hamas movement. Therefore, the Palestinian Hamas movement is aware of this sectarianism and tries to distance itself from it as much as possible. However, the Palestinian Hamas movement is accused by Arab countries of a Sunni nature of standing with Iran, with a Shiite nature. This accusation affects the position of Hamas and the Palestinian cause in general.

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