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Palestine

Hamas After 7 October: Resistance and Challenges

- Features -

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Following Ismail Haniyeh's assassination by Israel in Tehran on 31 July 2024 he was succeeded as head of Hamas' political bureau for the whole movement by Yahya Sinwar, who had led Hamas' political bureau for the Gaza Strip since 2017. According to Osama Hamdan, a senior Hamas official in Beirut, speaking to al-Jazeera, this choice was adopted 'unanimously'. Sinwar himself was killed by Israeli occupation forces, apparently unaware of his identity, on 17 October 2024.

Contrary to expectations, expressed in the Western Media and the White House, that Sinwar's killing represented an opportunity to end Israel's continuous genocidal war against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the negotiations for a final ceasefire between Israel and Hamas did not reach a conclusion until January 2025. After the assassination of its chief negotiator, Haniyeh, and then the killing of both his successor and Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, Hamas was rightly suspicious of the idea that Israel had any intention of entering talks in good faith. The group insisted that it would not participate in talks unless Israel halted its operations in Gaza and called for a return to the ceasefire deal proposed by President Joe Biden on 2 July 2024. Instead, Israel added new conditions and still insisted on its right to maintain its troops in Gaza, along the corridors of Netzarim, in the centre, and of Philadelphi, on the border with Egypt, as well as at the adjacent crossing point of Rafah.

Moreover, Brigadier General Elad Goren was nominated as head of the re-established Israeli civil administration in the Gaza Strip. This is a new position within the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) unit – a Defense Ministry unit responsible for coordinating civilian and humanitarian affairs in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Existing since the end of the Six-Day War of 1967, this unit was denounced by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in its advisory opinion of 19 July as a continuation of the Israeli occupation in Palestine.

At the same time, a large military operation was started at the end of August in the occupied West Bank, with massive violence, on a scale not seen there in twenty years. Within a few days, neighbourhoods of several cities had been targeted, dozens of civilians had been murdered, displaced, and besieged, and swathes of civilian infrastructure was destroyed. This followed months of escalating violence against Palestinians by the Israeli occupation army and settlers in the West Bank, where they had assassinated more than 840 people since 7 October. Israeli authorities also seized more than 2,000 hectares of land, declared them state property, and gave Israeli Jews exclusive rights to lease them. Israel also transferred vast swathes of sovereignty over the West Bank from the military to the far right-dominated civilian government and its ministries, granting the latter full authority over the acquisition and development of new settlements. The main objective of the Israeli strategy in the West Bank is its annexation, by dispossessing the Palestinians and confiscating their lands. Israeli violence in the West Bank against Palestinians actually increased after the January 2025 ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

In this context of continuous genocidal war against the Palestinians – only paused, and precariously so, by the ceasefire – Hamas is facing difficult challenges regarding its future in the Gaza Strip and relations to its popular basis, as well as its regional alliances and collaborations. This said, before addressing the issue of the Hamas movement and its future, it must be clearly stated that any serious and honest criticism of this party cannot be developed without the premise of both clear opposition to the racist and colonial apartheid state of Israel and the denunciation of the genocide, and support for Palestinian self-determination and their right to resistance.

Hamis' popular basis, between expansion and criticisms

Like Islamic fundamentalist parties, Hamas's popular constituency is not based on a single social class. Hamas' base developed in two waves, first when it joined the struggle against Israel in 1987 and pursued military resistance in the 1990s and 2000s, and second when it took over the Gaza Strip in 2007. The military resistance of Hamas, its opposition to the Oslo agreement and Israeli repressive policies, alongside its networks of social charity organisations, – based on the former networks of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and al-Mujamma al-Islami – and mechanism of Islamisation of the society, have enabled the Palestinian Islamic movement to build a large popular constituency. This constituency hails mainly from the working classes of the Palestinian population of the occupied territories, while also maintaining links with more traditional bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces.

The Palestinian Islamic movement has indeed historically enjoyed the general support and the sympathy of businessmen, landowners, merchants and shopkeepers. Hamas, and earlier the MB in the occupied territories, has usually included merchants, business people and sections of wealthy Palestinians. The first (undeclared) head of the Hamas movement, in power until 1993, Dr. Khairy Hafez 'Uthman al-Agha, was, for instance, a businessman and held a PhD in business administration. He was a member of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood movement in his youth and spent the larger part of his life – from the 1950s – in Saudi Arabia, and also died there.

At the end of the 2000s and beginning of the 2010s, Hamas was able to nurture a new generation of businessmen in Gaza who were linked to the party through the expansion of the tunnel system, while weakening the older generation of traditional businessmen often connected to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Most of the tunnels were funded by private investors, usually Hamas members who partnered with families straddling the border. An International Labour Organisation report cited the emergence of 600 'tunnel millionaires', many of them seeking somewhere to park their profits, who invested first in land and then in hundreds of luxury apartment buildings. The Al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing, established oversight over much of the tunnel network, taking over from a disparate network of clans and other political parties.

At the same time, the Al-Qassam Brigades have developed financial schemes and investments outside of the Gaza Strip through various networks of businessmen. According to the US Treasury, Hamas had established by 2022 a secret network of companies managing \$500 million of investments in companies from Turkey to Saudi Arabia.

The social background of the leadership in the Gaza Strip, historically predominantly composed of people from petty-bourgeois and lower-middle-class origins and largely from refugee background, was more conducive to its spread than the West Bank leadership, which was initially mostly from a wealthier social background among the bourgeoisie and traditional elite.

One key feature of Hamas is that a large majority of its leadership and cadre have high levels of education and tend to come from liberal professional layers. There may also be a certain 'petit-bourgeois' mentality among many of Hamas' employees developed through becoming salaried cadres, particularly among those in leading positions in the administration of the Gaza Strip, who are largely from a proletarian background. This dynamic is, however, greatly reduced by the political and social reality of Gaza, characterised by a murderous siege and continuous wars by the Israeli occupying army, maintaining a relatively important link between local Hamas cadres and the Palestinian working classes.

In contrast to other Islamic fundamentalist movements in the region, it is important to note that the process of bourgeoisification of the Hamas leadership has been more limited. This is connected to the limitation of significant capitalist development in the Occupied Territories, and more particularly in the Gaza Strip since the imposition of the Israeli siege of Gaza in 2005, as well as the de-development policies imposed by Israeli occupation authorities.

Israel has pursued a policy that limits any form of indigenous economic and institutional development that could contribute to structural reform and capital accumulation, particularly in the industrial domain. Israel hinders the

Palestinians from developing any industries that could possibly compete with Israeli industries, thus increasing and maintaining the Palestinian economy's dependence on Israeli imports. The Palestinian conglomerates dominating the Palestinian economy in the West Bank are mostly based in the Gulf. The PA's economic strategy has been to strengthen these conglomerates, thus widening inequality levels in Palestinian society.

What has been the effect of 7 October 2023 on this profile? In the past year, Hamas has witnessed an increase in popularity in the West Bank and among Palestinians in neighbouring countries. According to Public Opinion Poll 93 conducted in the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip) in the end of September 2024 by the Palestinian centre for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), a majority of 54 per cent of the public support the 7 October attack and nearly 68 per cent believe it has placed the Palestinian issue at the centre of global attention. In this same poll, Hamas is the political party most preferred by the respondents, reaching 36 per cent, followed by Fatah (21 per cent), 6 per cent selecting third forces, while one third said they do not support any party or have no opinion. This demonstrates the continued popularity of Hamas among Palestinians and the continued weakening of support for the PA, with a majority of Palestinians increasingly voicing support for its dissolution or deep reform at all levels. Similarly in neighbouring countries, there have been displays of support for Hamas and new campaigns of recruitment, notably in Lebanon where the party's presence and institutions have been strengthened in the past decade as the relations and collaboration with Hezbollah and Iran increased considerably.

This said, Hamas' popularity in the Gaza Strip, its historical bastion, is more complex and nuanced, especially under the impact of genocidal war and massive destruction. In the polls mentioned above, support for Hamas in the West Bank has systematically been higher than in the Gaza Strip. This was already the case prior to 7 October, but this dynamic has been reinforced since. Hamas' rule in Gaza since 2007 has been marked by authoritarian and repressive practices, leading to a higher level of unpopularity there than in the West Bank.

Moreover, while the large majority of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip consider Israel the primary source of this current and new Nakba, criticisms against Hamas have become more and more prevalent since 7 October. As Mahmoud Mushtaha argues, in an article in +972 in August 2024,

as the war has dragged on, displays of public opposition to or criticism of Hamas have grown among Palestinians in Gaza. Many accuse Hamas of failing to anticipate the ferocity of Israel's response to the 7 October attacks, and hold the group partially accountable for the dire consequences they are now facing.

In response, Hamas has not hesitated to repress individuals, raising criticisms against the party and its actions in the past few months.

Mushtaha adds, however, that 'despite widespread anger toward the Hamas leadership, Gazans do not hold the young resistance fighters themselves accountable, recognising that they are also part of the population who were coerced into the war'.

At the same time, there is a trend toward the diminution of public support in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for the 7 October attack by Hamas. While the latest poll at the time of writing still shows a majority of 54 per cent in support, this is a decrease from 67 per cent in June 2024, and 71 per cent in March 2024, according to the PSR. This diminution in the support came from both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where it stood, in the end of September 2024 poll, at 64 per cent in the West Bank, a decrease of nine percentage points, and 39 per cent in the Gaza Strip, compared to 57 per cent three months prior, a decrease of 18 percentage points. In March 2024, 71 per cent of Gazans stated that Hamas' decision was 'correct'. At the same time, expectations that Hamas would win the war

have also continuously decreased. According to the PSR's poll of September 2024:

Half of the public expects Hamas to win, compared to 67 per cent three months ago and 64 per cent six months ago. It is worth noting, as the figure below shows, that fewer Gazans, at just 28 per cent today, expect Hamas to win compared to the results three and six months ago, when those percentages stood at 48 per cent and 56 per cent, respectively. Hamas's expectation of victory has also dropped significantly in the West Bank, where today it stands at only 65 per cent compared to 79 per cent three months ago. It is also worth noting that while 4 per cent in the West Bank expect Israel to win the current war, a quarter of Gazans expect Israel to win.

More generally, most of the indicators of the poll related to Hamas' popularity declined since the beginning of 2024, although they remain relatively high. Indeed, 58 per cent of the public interviewed at the end of September 2024 (73 per cent in the West Bank and 36 per cent in the Gaza Strip) said they preferred the return of Hamas after the end of the war to other options, while satisfaction with Hamas still was at 61 per cent. In comparison, 71 per cent of the West Bankers and 46 per cent of Gazans said they preferred to see Hamas remaining in control in the Gaza Strip in May 2024.

Moreover, following the conclusion of the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, Hamas has been able to re-establish some form of relative security, to restrict looting, and to begin restoring basic services in some regions. While Hamas' capabilities, both in terms of armament and human capacities, have been largely destroyed during the Israeli genocidal war, the Palestinian Islamic movement remains deeply rooted in the Gaza Strip, politically, socially and militarily. For instance, in a recent interview for Reuters after the ceasefire entered into effect, Ismail Al-Thawabta, director of the Hamas-run Gaza government media office stated that the Hamas-run administration continued to function, with 18,000 employees working daily to provide services to the local population, while Hamas has likely continued to recruit thousands of new fighters to its military wing.

Any assessment of Hamas' 'victory' following the conclusion of the ceasefire should be nuanced, to say the least. The ceasefire deal did not put an end to the deadly blockade on the Gaza Strip and allowed for the Israeli occupation army to consolidate its military occupation of the Gaza Strip. Indeed, the deal permitted Israeli control of a crucial strip of land along Gaza's border with Egypt, along with the Netzarim Corridor, an occupation zone constructed by Tel Aviv to divide the Gaza Strip into a northern and southern region, alongside an extension of Israel's military domination over a wider 'buffer zone' which is achieved through the destruction of Palestinian houses and the displacement of populations along Gaza's eastern and northern borders with Israel. This situation suffocates even further the small territory of the Gaza Strip and is in addition to the unprecedented level of destruction and ruins caused by the Israeli genocidal war against the Gaza Strip. According to a UN report, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip could take 350 years if the blockade remains in place.

Another significant question is the relative weight of the internal and external, military and political wings of Hamas' developments. The political weight of the Gaza Strip's wing within Hamas has been increasingly dominant within the movement's internal structures compared to the West Bank and the diaspora wings, starting slowly with Hamas' sole control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, passing through the regional uprisings in the 2010s, and finally materialising in the election of Ismail Haniyeh as head of the bureau's political movement in 2017 after the end of the mandate of Khaled Meshaal (1996–2017).

The assassination of Sinwar, after Haniyeh and longtime leader of al-Qassam Brigades Muhammad Deif, and continuous destruction of the Gaza Strip could potentially change this balance of forces towards the diaspora wing in the future. This said, for the current period, the dominant force in the party likely remains the Gaza wing. Indeed, since the assassination of Yahya Sinwar, his younger brother Muhammad Sinwar has been the shadowy leader of

the al-Qassam Brigades in the Gaza Strip, while Khalil Hayya, who hails from the Gaza Strip and who has been designated as the group's new leader in Gaza, has been the main figure involved in negotiating the ceasefire. All these personalities enjoy good relations with Iran.

Political strategy and regional alliances

Hamis has been able to position itself once again as the leading actor on the Palestinian political scene, further marginalising the already weak PA, with the 7 October military operation. Its main objectives were to challenge the status quo both on a national and regional level, which were both threatening the Palestinians' future. First, the actions aimed at responding to the continuous violations of human rights by the Israeli apartheid state, the siege in Gaza, attacks in the West Bank and expansion of settlements, attacks on al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and so on. Second, at the regional level the 7 October operation temporarily suspended the process of normalisation between some Arab states and Israel. Hamis' attack on Israel on 7th October, and Israel's response to it, have had the effect of undermining the process of normalisation initiated by Donald Trump and carried over by Joe Biden, ensuring that the occupation cannot be ignored on the road to smoothing out formerly hostile relations within the region. Soon after war erupted, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia responded by temporarily halting all progress on bilateral agreements between itself and Israel. During the ceasefire, Riyadh indicated that it is open to resuming talks.

Hamis' calculations regarding the 'day after' 7 October have, however, been demonstrated to have been largely misguided. The party was likely betting on a popular uprising in the occupied West Bank and a large participation of its regional allies of the so-called 'axis of resistance'. This has been limited, at most. In the West Bank, the Israeli occupation intensified its repressive campaigns and violent practices against the Palestinians with the aim of dissuading Palestinians from opening up a second front. As explained by the Palestinian Journalist Qassam Muaddi, writing in Mondoweiss,

In the first two months after 7 October, Israel doubled the already existing Palestinian prison population, at one point reaching over 10,000 prisoners... The scope of arrests also increased, widening to include Palestinians from all walks of life, including many who are not politically active. Many of the arrestees are community leaders, journalists, and civil society activists with little to no tenuous ties to politics. Inside the prisons, human rights reports and testimonies of released Palestinians all revealed unprecedented levels of humiliation, abuse, and torture, effectively extending the genocide of Palestinians to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody.

Regarding Iran, Hamis' main regional ally, its strategic aims, particularly since 7 October, have been to improve its political standing in the region so as to be in the best position for future negotiation with the US, and to guarantee its political and security interests. Similarly, Hezbollah exercised restraint against continuous and violent Israeli attacks and bombings throughout the Lebanese territory and not limited to the border regions, evidenced by its avoidance of attacks on Israeli cities or civilians. Israeli military operations killed nearly 600 Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon and Syria between October 2023 and September 2024, including many senior officers. Israel's war against Lebanon since mid-September 2024, with the support of the United States, challenged Hezbollah's plan to prevent a full military confrontation with the Israeli occupation army. Israeli intelligence first exploded thousands of communications devices used by Hezbollah members, both civilians and soldiers, which killed nearly 40 people and wounded several thousands, upon which its Air Force initiated a massive bombing campaign that also assassinated the party's senior military and political leaders including Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. It also killed several thousands civilians and forcibly displaced over a million Lebanese citizens. The Israeli occupation army subsequently commenced a ground invasion of a strip of territories in the south of Lebanon.

Israel's occupation army has therefore been able to pursue with full force its genocidal war in the Gaza Strip, while expanding its military and brutal repressive actions in the West Bank, as well as launching a war against Lebanon, occupying further territories in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime, and continuously bombing the region.

Hamis' calculations were based on a political strategy that did not necessarily differ from that of other Palestinian political parties. According to its 2017 charter and official statements from its leadership, Hamis seeks political alliances with the region's ruling classes and their regimes to support their political and military battles against Israel, so as to potentially reach a brokered settlement based on a two state solution.

Based on this perspective, Hamis leaders have cultivated alliances with Qatar and Turkey in recent years, as well as with the Islamic Republic of Iran, its main political, financial and military supporter. Iran's yearly direct assistance to the party has been estimated to be around \$75 million.

The conclusion of the US-brokered Abraham Accords in the summer of 2020, and the further normalisation of Israeli relations with Arab states, as well as the rapprochement between Turkey and Israel, only increased Hamis' fears and concerns of a liquidation of the Palestinian issue and strengthened the party's crucial alliance with Iran – and therefore Hezbollah.

The leadership changes within Hamis' political movement have also had an impact on its regional alliances, most directly the recent elevation of figures drawn from its military wing to higher positions within the organisation. While the relationship with Iran has certainly been maintained on a political and military level over the last decade (despite disagreements about the Syrian uprising), the replacement of Khaled Meshaal with Ismael Haniyeh as Hamis' leader in 2017 opened the door to closer relations between Hamis, Hezbollah, and Iran. Meshaal had made attempts during his rule to steer Hamis away from Iran and Hezbollah in favour of improved relations with Turkey, Qatar, and even Saudi Arabia, a move opposed by the al-Qassam Brigades' leadership. Haniyeh's ascension, combined with the nomination of al-Qassam founder Sheikh Saleh al-Arouri as deputy head of Hamis' political bureau, put a decisive end to any such shift, and Yahya Sinwar as the leader of Hamis in the Gaza Strip only consolidated the alliance with Iran.

At the same time, Hamis has been attempting to improve its relations with other Gulf monarchies, most importantly the Saudi Kingdom, but with more difficulty. In the beginning of 2021, following the reconciliation between Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, Hamis leader Ismail Haniyeh praised Saudi King Salman bin Abdul-Aziz al-Saud's and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS's) efforts to resolve the Gulf crisis and achieve reconciliation. In 2023, senior Hamis leaders visited Saudi Arabia for the first time since 2015, while the Saudi Kingdom started releasing, during the same period, the sixty-eight Palestinians and Jordanians arrested in 2019 and accused of having links to an unidentified 'terrorist organisation'. This included, a few months before Hamis' visit to Saudi Arabia in October 2022, the release of a former representative of Hamis, Mohammed al-Khudari, eighty-four, and his son, Hani al-Khudari, who had been held in detention for more than three years. Both were subsequently deported to Jordan.

The evolution of the situation between Saudi Arabia and Hamis was connected to the rapprochement between Tehran and Riyadh, which is ongoing. The temporary suspension of the normalisation process between Saudi Arabia and Israel following the Israeli genocidal war on the Gaza Strip also reinforced cooperation between the two. This normalisation process was an outcome of Saudi Arabia's evolving strategy of regional foreign policy. The confrontational and aggressive foreign policy adopted by MBS, symbolised by the deadly war initiated against Yemen in 2015 and the maximum pressure put on Iran and its allies in the region, has been a failure. This policy turned out to be too politically costly and damaging to the Saudi Kingdom's project of reforming the economy. Riyadh has therefore tried to establish more cordial relations with its neighbours and more generally seek a form of authoritarian stability in the region. Finally, the reorientation of Saudi foreign policy is principally linked to the need for the kingdom

to concentrate on economic reforms and the Saudi Vision 2030 objectives.

The aftermath of 7 October has seen a show of rhetorical support by Gulf monarchies and Turkey to the Palestinians, and condemnations of Israeli war. However, regional states remained relatively passive in practical terms in the face of Palestinian suffering during the Israeli occupation army's genocidal war against the Gaza Strip. Leaders of Arab and Muslim countries at a joint summit of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on 11 November 2023 in the Saudi capital did condemn the 'barbaric' actions of the Israeli occupying forces in the Gaza Strip, but refrained from issuing punitive economic and political measures. No Arab regimes have broken their peace agreements with Israel, while Egyptian authorities, which have collaborated with Israel in the blockade of Gaza since 2007, have not attempted to break the blockade and alleviate the famine in Gaza. In addition, Egypt started to build, in early 2024, a walled enclosure and cleared more than six square miles of land in its North Sinai province. This was intended to 'park' Palestinians if a large number of them were expelled from the Gaza Strip towards Egypt by Israel's occupation army. This enclosure is surrounded by concrete walls and far from any Egyptian settlements.

Although the now toppled Syrian regime through Bashar al-Assad rhetorically declared solidarity with the Palestinians, it showed neither an interest in nor the capacity to directly participate in a response to the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, despite also suffering constant Israeli attacks even before 7 October. This was in line with the Syrian regime's policy since 1974 of trying to avoid any significant and direct confrontation with Israel. Further, condemnation by Syrian officials of the Israeli war would not lead to any form of military or political support for Hamas. There would be no strengthening of relations between the two actors, no return to the pre-2011 set-up, which was cut after Hamas refused to support the Syrian regime in its murderous repression of the Syrian uprising. While the Syrian regime restored ties with Hamas in summer 2022, that took place through Hezbollah mediation, and relations between Syria and Hamas remained mainly governed through interests structured by and connected to Iran and Hezbollah. Moreover, Damascus continued to label Hamas as "traitorous" and ordered the arrest of individuals connected to the group, even after the reconciliation between both actors. Following the fall of Assad's regime, documents revealed ongoing operations to target anyone with ties to the Palestinian Islamic movement, according to the pan-Arab Al-Quds Al-Arabi. It remains to be seen whether Hamas will establish better relations with the new Syrian government.

On their side, Saudi Arabia, as well as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), played an important role in helping Israel Occupation Forces neutralise the Iranian 'attack' in April 2024 by sharing information with the US and Israel. The Saudi monarchy also authorised US Air Force tanker planes to remain in their airspace to support US and allied patrols during the operation. Moreover, any show of sympathy on social media or in public to Hamas in the Saudi Kingdom has been severely repressed.

Turkey, despite Recep Tayyip Erdogan's criticism of Israel and a government-imposed trade ban on Israel since May 2024, maintains close economic ties with the country. According to data released by the Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM), Turkish businesses appear to be bypassing the trade ban by routing exports through Palestinian Authority customs: there was a 423 per cent increase in exports to Palestine during the first eight months of 2024, with exports in August alone surging by over 1,150 per cent, climbing from \$10 million last year to \$127 million, as revealed in Turkish Minute. Trade between both countries has also been ongoing through third countries like Greece, as revealed by Ragip Soylu in Middle East Eye on 4 September. In addition, Turkey and Israel also found common ground during Azerbaijan's military aggression against Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh, populated primarily by Armenians. Israeli and Turkish drones, as well as support from both countries' intelligence services, proved essential to Azerbaijan's victory over the Armenian armed forces. More than 100,000 Armenians, nearly the entire current population of 120,000, have been forced to flee Nagorno-Karabakh and become refugees.

Conclusion – Hamas repeating old mistakes

Hamis has been trying to balance its relations with these different actors. On one side, its relations with Iran, alongside Hezbollah, has been crucial to provide Hamis with military assistance including weapons and training, in addition to important financial funding. Hamis, however, has never been and is not a simple puppet of Iran. It has its own autonomy in relation to Tehran.

On the other side, Hamis wants to maintain its close relations with Turkey and Qatar, which are considered key intermediaries to reach the USA and European states, and important locations for their political activities and to raise money through donation campaigns for the movement and charitable institutions affiliated with the movement in the Palestinian territories. Hamis also wants to develop more cordial relations with Gulf monarchies, particularly Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries, including Jordan and Egypt.

Hamis will likely continue to seek the support of both as a strategy to strengthen its position against Israel and in its attempts to arrive at a two-state solution.

However, rather than advance the struggle, these regimes restrict their support for the cause to areas where it advances their own regional interests and betray it when it does not. The reluctance of Iran and Hezbollah to react and launch a more intense military response to the Israeli war of October 2023 against the Palestinians in order to preserve their own political and geopolitical interests demonstrates this. Iranian leaders have repeatedly reiterated their unwillingness to extend the current war to the entire region. Rather than a full-scale military engagement of Hezbollah in Lebanon against Israel, they preferred that Hezbollah serve as a 'pressure front' against Tel Aviv, as expressed by the late secretary general of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah. Iran did not want its crown jewel, Hezbollah, to be weakened.

After the escalation of violence of the Israeli occupation army against Lebanon in mid-September 2024 and attacks on Hezbollah's infrastructures and leadership, the Lebanese party's main and most urgent priority was first of all to protect its internal structures and its chain of command, including by filling the vacuum at the top by electing a new secretary-general and replacing its political and military leadership, all of whom were assassinated by the Israeli occupation army. This was also part of its attempt to maintain and protect its military capabilities, including long-range missiles and rockets, against Israeli attacks and offensives. Persisting with the strategy of 'unity of the fronts' became more and more difficult to defend in the face of mounting losses and destruction.

This shift in priorities partly explained the rhetorical evolution of Hezbollah regarding its objective since October 7. Hezbollah officials stated after the assassination of Hassan Nasrallah that their priority was to end the Israeli aggression against Lebanon and to support a cease-fire regardless of the status of the fighting in Gaza. Similarly, during his tour in the Gulf, Iranian foreign minister Abbas Araghchi confirmed the separation between the Lebanese and Gaza fronts, saying 'there must be a cease-fire in Gaza and Lebanon, but the idea that stopping the fighting in Lebanon is a necessity and a priority is also correct'.

A ceasefire was eventually concluded on 27 November 2024, between Hezbollah and Israel. The ceasefire agreement provided for a sixty-day period (until the end of January 2025) for the Israeli army to withdraw from South Lebanon and Hezbollah fighters north of the Litani River, while the Lebanese army and UN peacekeepers were to deploy in these regions. The ceasefire, however, did not prevent the Israeli army from continuing to carry out strikes and incursions and delay the withdrawal from villages in the South, destroying infrastructure, bombing and killing civilians. These actions served as a message to Hezbollah that Israel will continue its actions despite the end of the war to prevent the Lebanese movement from reconstituting its military capacities in these areas. In addition, there are still significant doubts that Israeli occupation forces will withdraw from south Lebanon at the time agreed in the ceasefire, at the end of January 2025. Meanwhile, Iran's geopolitical objective is not to liberate the Palestinians but to use these groups as leverage, particularly in its relations with the United States. Iran's reluctance to react and launch a more intense military response to the Israeli war against the Palestinians in order to preserve its own political and

geopolitical interests is proof of this. Moreover, Iran in the past has not hesitated to reduce the funding for Hamas when their interests did not coincide: Tehran had diminished significantly its financial assistance to Hamas after the eruption of the uprising in Syria in 2011 and the Palestinian movement's refusal to support the Syrian regime's murderous repression against Syrian protesters.

On the other side, Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf and Arab states are very much connected to US imperialism and will not challenge this relation for the sake of the Palestinians. Doha welcomes the largest US military bases in the Middle East, with more than 10,000 US personnel at Qatar's Al-Udeid Air Base, home to the Forward Headquarters of US CENTCOM and USAF Central Command's 379th Air Expeditionary Wing, while the emirate was designated by the Biden administration in 2022 as a 'major non-NATO Ally of the United States'. Moreover, Saudi Arabia is ready to pursue the normalisation process with Israel if Washington accedes to Saudi Arabia's demand of a 'mega deal', including a US security umbrella like Israel's and aid for the development of a civil nuclear program. The advancement of the normalisation process between Israel and Arab countries, particularly Gulf monarchies, is an important objective of the US government to consolidate their interests in the region, including in its rivalry with China.

Hamas, like the majority of dominant Palestinian political parties, seeks political alliances with the region's ruling classes and their regimes to support its political and military struggle against Israel. This is, however, a recipe for defeat, as past experiences with Fatah and PLO have shown. Hamas collaborates with these regimes and advocates non-intervention in their political affairs, even as these regimes oppress their own popular classes and the Palestinians within their borders. In addition, these regimes are often entrenched in the US capitalist and imperialist system and / or enjoy good relations with other imperialist forces such as China or Russia, while only seeing the Palestinian issue as a cause to instrumentalise for their own political and geopolitical interests. At worst, they both directly repress Palestinian movements and crack down on any form of solidarity with Palestine seen as a direct threat to their own power.

This said, Hamas can't be compared with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its policies. The peace process reduced the PA to ruling over a bantustan entirely under Israeli control and occupation. The US and Israel supported the PA, which controlled Palestinians in the West Bank as well as Gaza (before the latter was taken over by Hamas in 2007). The PA has been acting as a police force for Washington and Tel Aviv's interests. The latest example is the violent repressive campaign led by PA security forces against Palestinian armed groups, particularly militants affiliated with the 'Jenin Battalion', in the Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank that began in December 2024. This came after a particularly bloody year of Israeli repression against the refugee camp, which suffered nearly eighty Israeli raids during 2024, killing at least 220 people, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. This unprecedented repressive campaign by the PA of course serves the Israeli security agenda and seeks to demonstrate its usefulness and role in the Palestinian Occupied Territories to the US administration under President Trump. And after the PA and the armed factions in the Jenin refugee camp finally concluded an agreement, the Israeli occupation army launched a large-scale military operation against the camp.

While recognising the difficulties of the Palestinian situation characterised by a genocidal war, apartheid, colonisation, ongoing occupation, fragmentation both territorially and at the level of its population, etc., and while supporting the principle of the right of resistance, it must be understood that Hamas and other Palestinian political parties' current policies and regional alliances do not create the conditions for, nor a trajectory towards, the liberation of Palestinians. Palestinians need allies in order to free themselves from the State of Israel, which is a major economic and military power far superior to the Palestinians, but they will not find them among the existing regimes in the region. Moreover, the Israeli economy is not dependent on the Palestinian labour force, which does not play a key role in its capital accumulation process, unlike, for example, during Apartheid in South Africa. Historically, the primary goal of Israel and its settler-colonial project is not to exploit Palestinians and depend on their labour force, but to see them disappear.

In this context, it is necessary to consider the Palestinian and regional popular classes as the central social forces capable of creating the conditions required to envisage a strategy of liberation. A large majority of the regional popular classes identify with the struggle of the Palestinians, and therefore see their own battle for democracy and equality as bound up with its victory. That is why there is a dialectical relationship between the struggles; when Palestinians fight it triggers the regional movement for liberation, and the regional movement feeds back into the struggle in occupied Palestine. Their united revolt has the power to transform the entire region, toppling regimes, expelling imperialist powers, ending both these forces' support for the State of Israel and weakening it in the process. Far-right minister Avigdor Lieberman recognised the danger that regional popular uprisings posed to Israel in 2011 when he said the Egyptian revolution that toppled Hosni Mubarak and opened the door to a period of democratic renewal in the country was a greater threat to Israel than Iran.

On an international level, the most important task for those outside the region is to win the left, unions, progressive groups, and movements to support the campaign for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions against Israel and make the latter completely persona non grata at all levels. Forcing this on institutions and corporations in the imperialist powers, especially the US and European states, will help block their support for Israel and other despotic regimes and weaken their hold in the region.

Palestine has become a political compass and the worldwide massive mobilisations in favour of its liberation have created the conditions for the potential structuring of a progressive pole within our societies – the fruit of the growing awareness that a victory for the Palestinian cause would be a success for our camp, opposed to the destructive impulses of neoliberal capitalism and the rise of fascism.

15 September 2025

Source [Salvage](#).

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