

How can we explain the success of Hamas ?

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

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*For a lot of medias, the case seems clear: the Hamas is terrorist, fundamentalist and fanatic. Though, this movement has won the last elections and his popularity increases among the Palestinians. Why? We raised the question to Mohamed Hassan, co-author of *Iraq, Eye-to-eye with the occupation*, and one of the best Middle-East specialists.*

What is really the Hamas?

Hamas is a political movement coming from the Muslim Brotherhood, which is one of the oldest political movements in Egypt. The word "hamas" means awakening, erupting... It's an islamo nationalist movement, which we could compare to the Irish catholic nationalist movement. In 1916, the Irish Republican Army has developed against the colonial British occupation. As the Irish were Catholics and the British settlers were Protestants, the occupier tried to make it a religious conflict. Religion can be utilized to mobilize people for a cause.

What is the historical context explaining the rise of the Hamas?

To understand that, we have to take a look to several events. The first one is the six-day war which discredited the Nasserism in 1967. Nasser was an Egyptian president who encouraged an Arabic revolution for independence and development. As Israel inflicted him a severe defeat, his ideology ran out of steam. After he died, Egypt and Israel were again engaged into a conflict with the October war in 1973. Egypt and Syria wanted to take back territories under Israeli occupation. Finally, Egypt and Israel signed an agreement but it created a division in the Arab world between the countries who wanted to accept the Israeli conditions and those who wanted to resist like Syria, Algeria, Iraq... Of course, the Palestinian question was crucial in those conflicts and the resistance to Israel drove to the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This organization was created in order to gather the several movements of resistance to ally their efforts in the struggle against Israel. Before negotiating with this organization at the Oslo accords, Israel considered it as terrorist organization and inflicted it several defeats that can explain the rise of the Hamas.

The first important defeat is the *Black September* in 1970. The PLO had his headquarter in Jordan where King Hussein made a deal with Israel to brutally crash the Palestinian insurrection. So the PLO was forced to flee to Beirut. The second important defeat comes in 1982. Israel attacked Lebanon and most of the PLO combatants had to move far away from the Palestinian areas and the headquarter of the organization was set in Tunis.

In this particular context, comes the first Intifada in 1987. A popular uprising in reaction to the Israeli occupation which started in Gaza and then touched the whole Palestine. As I said,

the PLO was very far away. On the contrary, the Hamas was inside Palestine and took part to the Intifada. That event marks the coming of the Hamas which started in the prisons! Prisons used to be considered as a place of punishment. But after that the resisters of the Intifada were put in jail, things have changed... It's in the prisons that the Hamas started to recruit and to develop as an organization. With the Intifada, the Hamas was exposed to the Palestinian opinion, to the Israeli opinion and to the international opinion.

How did the PLO react to the Intifada?

With the Intifada, the PLO was divided in two wings: the strongest one who wanted to continue the resistance and was installed in Tunis and those who wanted to work out a deal. Those ones were hiding and didn't have the courage to defend their opinion until the Oslo Accords where they came up and became stronger. Arafat was a tactician and after the end of the Intifada, in order to bring the PLO in Palestine, he used the different lines of the Palestinian reactions.

What were these lines?

First, you have those who wanted to continue the fight against Israel without concession. Arafat had to marginalize them to obtain something. In the other hand, you've got those who wanted to capitulate, and they lead the Palestinian government today. Finally, you've got the little bourgeoisie who wanted to negotiate for their own profits. Arafat used them to get what he wanted and it drives us to the Oslo Accords (1993). They allowed the PLO to come back in Palestine but except that, it was a great defeat. The Palestinians accepted to get only 22% of their total land! There is no agreement in history that confers to somebody only 22% of what he was demanding! The PLO was no more considered as a terrorist organization and won the recognition of Israel but didn't manage to really improve the situation in Gaza and Cisjordania. Nothing in the agreement was mentioned to stop the Israeli colonization. This fact discredited the Palestinian authority to the population and also explains the success of the Hamas as a movement of resistance. Another important point is that the Palestinian authority, which was receiving money from the West, became corrupted. On the contrary, the Hamas doesn't have this problem. The organization receives money mainly from a charity system. And there is no indication that they put this money in their pocket. As they critic the authority for its corruption, they are very cautious to this problem.

How can you explain the success of the Hamas?

Three factors explain the success of the Hamas. First, the maintaining of the resistance, refusing imposed solution, which correspond to the will of the population. The second point is that the Hamas wants the refugees of 1948 and 1967 to come back. In 1948, after the creation of the Israel state, a lot of Palestinians were pushed out of the territory. With the Six Day War in 1967, around three hundred thousand refugees flew away to Jordan. Today, there are more than six millions of refugees who don't have the right to go back to their land! On the other hand, as a Jewish state, Israel welcomes any Jew from everywhere: Spain, Russia, Ethiopia... People who have never been seen in Palestine! The question of the refugees is an important element of the Palestinian demands that the Hamas claim.

The last point which contributed to the success of the Hamas is the elimination within the Palestinian community of the elements used by Israel, corrupted people, to bring

information. A few ones were eliminated physically but most of them – delinquent people, alcoholics or drug dealers – were reintegrated by the social program of the Hamas. So the information doesn't circulate anymore. This is very important. Israel had made a corrupted society where everybody was against everybody and they exploited that to build an information network and have a control over the Palestinian resistance. This is a typical colonial mentality that the British also had applied in Northern Ireland. Nothing new. But the Hamas crushed that network and it's a big success against Israel.

Some people say Israel deliberately favored the rise of the Hamas. Is it true?

Absolutely not! There is no evidence on that. Israel tolerated Hamas, hoping interpalestinian conflicts. They wanted to weaken the PLO and the Fatah. But they didn't expect the quality, the ability and the organization of the Hamas to develop in such a way. Every colonial power always considers his subjects as naïve children.

How an Islamist movement went on so popular in Palestine?

Under the occupation of Gaza and the Palestinian areas, there is no possibility for the Palestinian people to openly discuss or have a vision about their future except in the mosque or in the university. Of course, the Hamas was already active on the first place. But they also then started, as any political group, to become dominant in student organizations. The market is open for every party! So the Hamas recruited brilliant young students who were well considered in the society because of their dedication or their honesty. It was easy for the group to convince them because they both want resistance. No big secret about it! Hamas spoke what was in the heart of the population. With the most combative, the most intelligent and the most highly educated elements of the society, Hamas became a big organization.

How did the Palestinian authorities react to the evolution of the Hamas?

Authorities have been involved into corruption and a lot of scandals. Even Palestinian journalists have condemned them for that. Arafat was a kind of arbiter between the several factions and once he died, the contradiction between Hamas and Fatah became antagonistic. Israel exploited those disagreements and managed to use the Fatah to cut the popularity of the Hamas in the political view. They were thinking that Hamas wouldn't accept to participate to elections so they organized it quickly. Everybody was surprised that the Hamas took part to those elections but nobody was really worried as they were thinking that the Hamas would come with a very limited dogmatic way of thinking and would be defeated by the major party. Against all expectations, the Hamas made a coalition and presented a flexible image, very far away from a fundamentalist organization. In fact, they wish an Islamic state but the reality is different.

Will the Hamas put an Islamic regime in Palestine or not?

Well, an Islamic regime is the maximum program of the Hamas but they couldn't apply it because on the ground, the organization is based on a patriotic movement. We've got to consider the fact that after the brutal Israeli war in Gaza, not only the Hamas was fighting but all the patriotic forces on the ground, including Fatah. This aggression has unified Palestinian people.

Can the Hamas change into a more progressive movement in alliance with other

movements? Yes, they can, because of the Israeli aggression. The idea that the Hamas will create a society based on an Islamic pattern of production is an illusion. It's impossible. In many ways, the Hamas looks like the Hezbollah, which says: « Lebanon is a country with a big diversity. We're just representing a fraction of it and our aim is to build with all the Lebanese progressives a national independent economy. » Finally, I would draw your attention over the fact that nobody asks the question of Islamic state for some countries like Saudi Arabia for example!

What is the social economic program of the Hamas?

Their project is a capitalist economy with an important state intervention. Let me notice than now, even the European conservatives want a state intervention. If you look at Iran, it's an Islamic state where you've got state intervention. But they refuse the domination from outside and want the wealth from the oil to be distributed. About the Hamas, you've got to know that it's not mostly his social program which had seduced the Palestinians but the fact that this movement embodies the resistance. And today, the resistance is the most important thing for the Palestinians.

What is the role of the woman according to the Hamas?

Their vision of the woman on paper and in the reality is different. Let me explain. In Palestine, the situation is very difficult. The women have to work to win their own bread and raise their children. Hamas could never forbidden women to work and force them to go back home. Except a few rich countries with oil, nobody thinks like that in the Arabic world. How could Hamas put out of the society more than 50% of the most active elements of the Palestinian community? In fact, some people in the West believe that the women could be controlled as passive subjects and think they've got no brain!

Of course, there are cultural differences between the Arabic world and the West. These differences are not well understood because of some clichés. Let me give you an example. In western bookshops, there are hundred of magazines with naked women, blondes with big breast... Nobody says it is disgusting and that the women on the covers should not been considered this way. But when someone sees a woman wearing a headscarf, he speaks about oppression! There is a kind of hypocrisy in the West. For example, in Indonesia, the regime is installed since 1965 after a putsch marked by the massacre of a million of communists. Most of the women now wear a headscarf. But nobody speaks about them because this country produces oil and is aligned with the West.

Why is the Hamas rejected in Europe?

Islam is not well received in Europe, which identifies itself to the Christianity. There is a real rejection of the Islam contribution to the development of the western civilization. So, as an Islamic group, the Hamas is not well considered. But why does someone who's against the Zionism have a problem with the Hamas? And why does the same person, who supports the Irish cause, have no problem with a catholic organization? The cultural difference explains that and we can observe that phenomenon. I'm just coming back from Egypt and I could observe that when you cross the Mediterranean Sea, you change of world, you change of way of thinking. I don't blame the Europeans. They are marked by their education and the mediatic propaganda. We are in a system where we always have to identify some enemies to justify our existence. I think we must put things in perspective.

For me, as a Marxist living in a western country, I have of course some contradictions with the Hamas and the Hezbollah. I regret that the resistance is led by a movement taking an inspiration in Islam, but that is so. And for the moment, those contradictions are secondary. On the other hand, I'm totally opposed with people like Abbas or Mubarak, who are laics but who serve the United State. I'm reading the news in Arab, I know the situation over there and I see the contradictions from a different point of view than the European left.

Why does the European left not (openly) support the Palestinian resistance?

The problem with the European left is that she refuses to make a big alliance against the imperialism, because of the Hamas, the women with headscarf and all sorts of pretexts. In fact, they accept to get involved in the big alliance of the Christians against the Islam. They go into the "civilization war" set in motion by American ideologists. They are more influenced than they believe. Why did the European left not get worked up when the Christian Phalangists slaughtered in Lebanon? For my part, as a laic, I've supported the Irish resistance against the British occupation and if those Irish are Catholics, it doesn't disturb me. In fact, the problem with the Europeans is that they have been educated in a civilization that has prejudices against the Jews and the Muslims.

Why is the Palestinian question so crucial for the USA ?

Palestine is a very small place and became yet one of the biggest stakes in the world for two reasons. First, the settler state created has to be defended by imperialism powers, US and Great Britain, to be the most dominant element the Middle East. This is a way to crush the revolutionary democratic movement in the region. If you crush the Palestinian issue, you prevent an alliance of the Arab world with all the lines of resistance in Iraq, Lebanon, ... At the time of the Shah, Iran was doing the police in the region. The United States had installed a military dictatorship to serve their interests in the region. After Iran, it is Israel. One of the most demonstrative examples of this practice is the revolution in northern Yemen in the 60's. Some officials, helped by Egypt to install a democratic republic in northern Yemen, led a coup. The cheick who was ruling Yemen ran away in Saudi Arabia. The Britains organized troops against the republic to crush the Arab nationalist movement and soldiers, trained by Israel, were involved to fight against the liberation forces. Israel was or is also participating as militias in Salvador, Sri-Lanka, Colombia,... In fact, wherever United State is involved, Israel is involved.

The second reason is the importance of Jerusalem as a holy city. It's the second important place for Islam. So this point mobilized all the Muslims in the world. Jerusalem is also important for the Christian Palestinians. Israel won't leave it. It would be considered as a victory for the Palestinian and the Islam. And of course, Jerusalem is a strategic place, on the border between Israel and the Cisjordania. So the question of that city is an important element considering the perpetual expansion of Israel. In fact, that state has no define border. They even don't have a constitution so they've got the possibility to go on with the expansion.

By butchering Gaza, what is the message that Israel wants to send ?

The message is "Israel will be there forever, even with the nuclear weapon. We can impose you what we want".

Will it work?

No because on the other side, there are combatants with an ability to sacrifice, something that the Israelis have lost. With this attack, Israel didn't obtain something on the feature. And the Hamas will get out reinforced. Even in Cisjordania, people are saying that if they were elections, they would vote for that party. In fact, those who resist always win.

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