

Hamas and al-Qaida Relation: Fact or Fallacy

- Alif Shukoor

Abstract

Making a 'terrorist' creates an atmosphere of fear in a people, and through which the makers tries to achieve a particular political aim. Terrorism is defined and studied from the western perspective, and therefore, 'terrorists' are created or some is given image of terrorist to gain political aims by its 'fathers'. Hamas, a genuine resistance organization works for liberation of Palestine from Zionist colonial power, is depicted as terrorist by the West, and consequently, the whole resistance activities held in Palestine transform into 'terror operations'. Tying all 'terrorists' in one rope eases the process of terrorization of resistance movements which fight genuinely to liberate the land. Hamas and al-Qaida are different in respect of ends and means, where the former works for achieving a confined aim through legitimate ways while the latter does not. Though both refer all actions to Islam, differ in overall character; and therefore they should not be considered as allies.

Being a genuine Islamic movement, Hamas holds explicit concepts in all matters which are important regarding its program. It considers Islam as a system inflexible in roots and versatile in branches, and as fundamental reference from which its program is made¹. Hamas follows Islamic specificity of adaptability in all time and space, versatility in character, clarity in ideas and strategies, sharpness in thoughts and practices, and totality in ideological understanding. Hamas, like all other movements, should be studied from its own explanations seriously before going through the views of critics.

Because of being a resistance movement interacts with the realities in ground, Hamas' political program is more highlighted rather than its socio-religious activities. The political content makes Hamas' ideological representation capable to engage with the practical obstacles of Palestinian civil life. In academic realms, Hamas is studied from the western interpretations and, consequently, the movement got an image of terrorist.

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¹ Quran: 14/24-25

“Seest thou not how Allah coineth a similitude: A goodly saying, as a goodly tree, its root set firm, its branches reaching into heaven. Giving its fruit at every season by permission of its Lord? Allah coineth the similitudes for mankind in order that they may reflect”. (Translated by: Marmaduke Pickthall, *Meanings of the Holy Quran*)

The West certified many organizations as terrorists, and they tied all of them in one rope in which Hamas was allied with al-Qaida and Taliban. According to this article, Hamas cannot be leveled with those who are violent, rigid, closed and unpopular. Though Hamas uses violence as a means of resistance, its activities are not confined to it. The movement is open, flexible, popular, genuine, religious and socio-political activist.

America launched international military campaign after the 9/11 attack in the name of 'global war on terrorism'. They led military operations in different Muslim countries 'to kill Usama bin Ladin' in which lakhs were preyed. As part of the war on terror, America strengthened support to Israel to wash the terrorist subjects out from Middle East. Hamas was branded as international terrorist organization during the war on terror campaign, and it was celebrated by global media. This has given Israel and western powers 'legitimacy' to lock Hamas and crush Palestinian resistance.

The western media accused Hamas of that the movement holds ideological and strategic relation with al-Qaida and Taliban. Bureau of Counterterrorism, an American official group under the US Department of State released a list of foreign terrorist organizations, and enlisted Hamas, Hizbullah and al-Qaida among them². Mahmud Abbas, President of Palestine Authority agreed to the so called Israeli propaganda of 'Hamas-al-Qaida alliance' through his statement to al-Hayat on 26 February 2008, that al-Qaida was present in Gaza and it was brought by Hamas. Both are allies³. Some people found historical connection between Hamas and al-Qaida, as both were emerged from same background. They accused Muhammad Qutub, an advocate of Muslim Brotherhood of being teacher of Usama bin Ladin in Saudi Arabia⁴. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyya's condemnation of Usama's assassination also was taken to account of Hamas' relation to al-Qaida⁵.

Is it really true? What is the truth behind the story? According to 'Al-Qaida: Constitutional Charter, Rules and Regulations', al-Qaida aims the victory of the mighty religion of Allah, the establishment of an Islamic regime and the restoration of the Islamic

² "Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations", *Bureau of Counterterrorism, US Department of State*, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>

³ Ambassador Dr. Dore Gold, "Hamas and al-Qaeda are the Same", *ArutzSheva*, 01.06.2010, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/9241>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jonathan Schanzer, "The Hamas-al-Qaeda Alliance", *Standard Weekly*, 02 May 2011, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/the-hamas-al-qaeda-alliance/article/558605>

Caliphate, God willing⁶. It also attempted to target the United States and its allies⁷. Aims and objectives of Hamas are far different from al-Qaida. Although both organizations refer their affiliation to Islam, Hamas doesn't aim establishment of an 'Islamic State' as al-Qaida does. Hamas' goal is to liberate Palestine and confront the Zionist project⁸. It clearly declares that Hamas' area of action is Palestine, and it conducts resistance or jihad against Zionist state, not against others. Al-Qaida explicitly announced global jihad against America, its aims, imperial occupation and all its allies who intervene in Muslim countries. Hamas' struggle is only against colonial power and not even against America who is an ally of Zionists.

John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt write: "the terrorist organizations that threaten Israel (e.g., Hamas or Hizbullah) do not threaten the United States, except when it intervenes against them (as in Lebanon in 1982). Moreover, Palestinian 'terrorism' is not random violence directed against Israel or 'the West'; it is largely a response to Israel's prolonged campaign to colonize the West Bank and Gaza Strip"⁹.

Associating resistance movements like Hamas who confined their activities in Middle East, with al-Qaida who has global agenda of jihad and international relations is not fair. Hamas is not a mysterious organization like al-Qaida, or not a crowd like Taliban. Hamas' model of government is best described in the words of Ahmad Yusuf, Hamas' deputy foreign minister that "we can learn a lot from the experience of Turkey's Islamists. The model of government that Hamas seeks to emulate is that of Turkey under the AKP, rather than Afghanistan or al-Qaida"¹⁰. "Hamas looks at Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey as a good model. We are not Taliban, we are Erdogan"¹¹. "Hamas wants to establish good relations between the religious and secular elements of society and strives for human rights, democracy and an open society"¹².

⁶"Al-Qaida Constitutional Charter: Rules and Regulations" (translated and published by *Defense Intelligence Agency*, Washington, D.C, 11 August 2002

⁷"Global al-Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives and Future Challenges", *Committee on Foreign Affairs, US Government*, 18 July 2013

⁸"A Document of General Principles and Policies", *Hamas*, www.hamas.ps/en

⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, Stephen M. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, Fall 2006

¹⁰ Prof. Yezid Sayigh, "Hamas Rule in Gaza: Three Years On", *Middle East Brief*, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, No. 41, March 2010

¹¹ Rami Almeghari, "Interview: Hamas advisor on talking to the US, Fatah and Israel", *The Electronic Intifada*, 27 October 2008, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/ei-interview-hamas-advisor-talking-us-fatah-and-israel/7775>

¹²"Interview with Ahmad Yousef: Hamas: we want Erdogan's model, not Taliban's", *The Daily Hurriyet*, 10 June 2010

Al-Qaida and Hamas didn't agree each other in many matters. Although both refer Islam as primary source of thinking, they hold different views regarding means and ends. Hamas believes in political participation while al-Qaida does not. When Hamas changed its view regarding Israel and agreed phased liberation of Palestine, al-Qaida criticized Hamas for accommodating Israel and the West. Hamas has accused al-Qaida of attempting to graft the Palestinian struggle onto the global jihad¹³. Al-Qaida blamed Hamas for participating in the secular government in Palestine saying that Hamas had lost its religion¹⁴.

Al-Qaida strengthened in Palestine after 9/11 events. In fact, Hamas always kept distance with al-Qaida and its linked organizations, and sometimes fought each other. In an open combat held in Gaza on 13 August 2009 between JundAnsarullah¹⁵ and Hamas, 13 people including the leaders of both groups' military wings were killed and 85 more were wounded. The anger transformed into violent clashes after Abdul Latif Musa, the leader of the JundAnsarullah announced creation of an Islamic state in Rafah, and said Hamas is insufficiently Islamic¹⁶.

Hamas is listed among terrorists by some countries like America, Israel, Britain, Australia, Canada, Japan and European Union. The movement is banned in Jordan. At the same time, many countries including Europeans recognized Hamas as democratic organization, especially after electoral victory of 2006. On the eve of 2006 electoral victory, Russia invited a Hamas delegation to Moscow. France has supported the Russian move. Those who grant political legitimacy to Hamas rejected to compare it to al-Qaida. They agreed to say that Hamas is more pragmatic and open, and it, unlike al-Qaida until now has not targeted the West¹⁷.

¹³ Bill Roggio, "Hamas and al Qaeda-linked group clash in Gaza", *FDD's Long War Journal*, 14 August 2009, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/08/hamas_and_al_qaeda_1.php

¹⁴ Mary Habeck, "Al-Qa'ida and Hamas: The Limits of Salafi Jihadi Pragmatism", *CTC Sentinel, Combating Terrorism Center*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, February 2010, <https://ctc.usma.edu/al-qaida-and-hamas-the-limits-of-salafi-jihadi-pragmatism/>

¹⁵ An al-Qaida offshoot which called for the creation of an Islamic state

¹⁶ Bill Roggio, "Hamas and al Qaeda-linked group clash in Gaza", *FDD's Long War Journal*, 14 August 2009, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/08/hamas_and_al_qaeda_1.php

¹⁷ Dore Gold, "Ties between al-Qaeda and Hamas in Mideast are long and frequent / it shouldn't be any surprise that the two groups share ideology", *SF Gate*, 5 March 2006, <https://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/Ties-between-al-Qaeda-and-Hamas-in-Mideast-are-2521827.php>

In his book, KhaledHroub differentiates Hamas from al-Qaida with certain points. Both organizations are entirely different in aims, nature, style of works, means of action, etc. Major differences are summarized below¹⁸:

1. Aims of Hamas are focused. Began with the aim of liberation of entire Palestine, Hamas refocused on West Bank and Gaza Strip. Al-Qaida aims to establish Islamic rule over Arab and Muslim lands after eliminating foreign troops and puppet regimes.
2. Al-Qaida holds strict interpretation of Islamic practices with ‘Taliban model’ as ideal. Hamas follows moderate way of Islamic movements.
3. Hamas engaged in both armed struggle and political conduct. Al-Qaida follows armed struggle in all its forms, i.e. conventional confrontation against combatants, suicide bombings, targeting civilians without reservations, etc.
4. Hamas fights against Israel within the borders of Palestine. Al-Qaida considers the entire world to be its battlefield.
5. Hamas has never targeted westerners either inside or outside Palestine. Al-Qaida considers westerners as legitimate targets anywhere be they combatants or civilians.
6. Hamas is a multifaceted socio-political organization thriving within defined borders and parameters, and publicly engaged in political and democratic process. Al-Qaida is completely secretive and underground organization, almost confines to military activities without any socio-political programs.

For Hamas, resistance is a central principle and a concept really led to the formation of organization. Its resistance program is widely misunderstood as terrorist attacks; especially martyrdom operation¹⁹ (or suicide bombing, according to critics). It is discussed a lot internationally both in academic and non-academic realms. Many Muslim scholars put different opinions on this issue, some supported while others opposed. The supporters counted it as part of struggle, and the critics didn’t consider it likewise, but just suicide operations. For Hamas and their supporters, it is not suicide bombings, but martyrdom operations. The fight between Palestine and Israel is not of equal strengths. Israel, with the support of global powers had occupied Palestine. So the martyrdom operation is imposed on Palestinians as a strategy to defend themselves and counter the settler colonialism.

¹⁸KhaledHroub, *Hamas A Beginner’s Guide*, Pluto Press London, 2006, p. 101-103

¹⁹ In Arabic: ‘*amaliyyaistishhādiyya*

Use of violence to achieve political gains is not uniquely a Muslim phenomenon. It has been used by many organizations in different countries to confront the governments, assassinate political opponents, ethnically cleans the people, etc. One example of violent groups is Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, who struggles for an independent Tamil state, began to carry out violence in the form of suicide bombings in 1987. It is estimated that they have since perpetrated over 200 such attacks. The Tamil suicide bomb attacks were employed primarily to assassinate politicians opposed to their cause. In 1991, they assassinated former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi; and in 1993, they assassinated President RanasinghePremadasa of Sri Lanka; and in 1999, the Tigers attempted to assassinate Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga using a female suicide bomber²⁰.

Hamas uses violence only to confront the Zionist colonialism, not to achieve unlawful political gains. Resistance is a legitimate right for all, and for Hamas, it is not an end but a means to achieve legitimate Palestinian rights.

If Hamas practices only violence, how it could agree peace formulas. The movement keeps concept of truce as a traditional Islamic practice to cease violence and find peace without relinquishing Palestinian national rights. The concept of truce is a legitimate and binding contract whose objective is to bring about a ceasefire with an enemy with mutual conditions for an agreed period of time. The Holy Quran says: “And if they incline to peace, incline you also to it, and trust in Allah. Lo! He is the Hearer, the Knower”²¹

Hamas strongly thinks the means should realize the ends through legitimate ways. So, the movement holds unique specificity of practicing violence only against foreign occupying powers to liberate the society, and not against national governments, civilians and other organizations. How an organization, like Hamas who uses violence as a mean of resistance, and who is depicted by international media as terrorist, did function in democratic political system of governance. And how did Hamas get influence in Palestinian society at grassroots level.

The facts prove ‘Hamas and al-Qaida relation’ is nothing but a fallacy. The entire nature of both organizations is completely different. Media projected Hamas as equal to al-Qaida who proclaimed their aim is to establish ‘Islamic state’ through global jihad; and for its fulfillment they used terror attacks and killing of civilians without any provisos. Hamas is

²⁰AzzamTamimi, *Hamas A History from Within*, Olive Branch Press Massachusetts, 2011, p. 163

²¹ Quran 8/61, Translated by: MarmadukePickthall, *Meanings of the Holly Quran*

basically a resistance movement uses different methods to defend themselves and liberate Palestine from Zionist settlers. But its means are not confined to violence. They talk on peace, truce and ceasefire; and they are active in social services, education, religious preaching and socio-political programs. Above all, they are live in practical political scene through engaging with democratic set up, participating in elections, and finally forming a government. A mere violent group with rigid concepts and programs cannot do all these things with its entirety.

What is said about conventional or customary concepts of any people that “in theory everything is possible; however, when live in practice the road to theory is washed out” is true to maximum extent. The conservative concepts keep silence about the practical realities of human life in its entirety, and provide easy life far from problems and tensions; however, it gives typical solutions to some simple or trouble-free matters. Here, it is talked about the socio-political conditions of the Palestinian people. Facing their realities and handling their problems are not an easy task grounded in customs and traditions.

Israel and its allies failed to prove ‘Islamic terrorism’ on Hamas and they couldn’t finish Palestinian resistance. Through its moderate, developed and flexible concepts and practices, Hamas grew up as a popular political movement. Consequently, it resulted in making the movement rightful to lead a government through democratic means. Strategies are made always from theories and policies. Hamas showed the opposite that, sometimes, theories can be developed from practices and real life experiences. The movement expanded itself from ‘old views’ to ‘modern and moderate visions’; and expressed it through its documents and pragmatic approaches. It presented a new Hamas, an internationally legitimate movement with advanced outlook.

For Hamas, Islam promotes peace and tolerance. It provides a comprehensive way of life and an order that is fit in all times and places. Resistance and jihad for the liberation of Palestine will remain a legitimate right, a duty and honour for all Palestinians. Hamas takes stands in different issues on the base of clear policies some of which are fundamentals and unchangeable, and others are pro tem and changeable.

Hamas’ character is best described in its official documents where the latest ‘Document of General Principles and Policies’ possesses important position; according to which Hamas is a Palestinian Islamic national liberation and resistance movement aimed to

liberate Palestine and confront the Zionist project. Hamas considers Islam is against all forms of religious, ethnic or sectarian extremism and bigotry. Palestine has always been and will always be a model of coexistence, tolerance and civilizational innovation. The movement believes in pluralism, democracy, acceptance of the other, the adoption of dialogue and national partnership; and aims joint action to accomplish national goals²².

The propaganda of searching relation between al-Qaida and Hamas aims to crush the historic Palestinian resistance. Israel, a strong atomic power, together with its allies couldn't fulfill their aim of establishing a peaceful Jewish country only because of resistance movements. The main voice in opposition camp belongs to Hamas. Giving the image of terrorist is only a stick in the hands of anti-Hamas campaigners to beat the movement. 'A poor goat cannot be beaten until it would be projected as a cruel dog'.

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