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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN AND THE PALESTINIAN HAMAS MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE (2010-2015)

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Abstract

The period between 2010 and 2015 is considered one of the most important turning points in the Middle East region in general, especially in the relationship between the Palestinian Hamas movement and the Islamic Republic of Iran at all levels and areas. This period witnessed political changes in the political reality in the region. The Middle East has been through the demise of political systems and the birth of new political systems, which had an impact on the axis of resistance, especially in the relationship between Hamas and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The relationship between Hamas and Iran has been affected by these changes, especially after the events in Syria and Yemen. The independence of the Hamas decision and the failure to comply with Iranian orders has emerged.

This paper attempts to examine the decision of Hamas independent of Iran's orders regarding the changes in the Middle East through Iran's demand that Hamas participate in current events

in Syria and Yemen in favor of a certain party against another party, and what Hamas's position on Iranian demands is. This paper will be based on the theoretical framework on the theory of international alliance and the nature of the alliance between state and non-state actor. The relationship between Iran and Hamas is an alliance relationship, considering that Hamas is not a state but a non-state actor. The methodology used in this paper is to analyze Iranian behavior toward Hamas, considering that Iran is considered the leader of the resistance alliance against Israel, and to clarify the Hamas' response to Iranian demands. The researcher found that Iran is exploiting the Palestinian cause to achieve the purely Iranian interests through slogans and speeches to the Arab and Islamic peoples, Iran's support for Hamas aimed at achieving Iranian interests in the Middle East region and not serving the Palestinian cause. Hamas is trying to maintain the independence of its national decision without interfering in the internal affairs of Arab and Islamic countries.

Keywords

Iran, Hamas, Arab spring, Syrian event, Palestinian issue

1. Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran is the main supporter of the Palestinian Hamas movement, especially in the field of military training and armament, and the relationship between Iran and Hamas since the nineties of the last century, An anti-Israel alliance was later named the Resistance Alliance, which includes the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian regime, the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Palestinian Hamas movement and the Islamic Jihad movement in Palestine.

The relationship between Iran and Hamas developed after Hamas won Palestinian legislative elections in 2006 by increasing financial, military and political support for the Hamas-led Palestinian government. With Hamas controlling Gaza, Iran stood by Hamas by strengthening its military profile. The Iranian behavior is an interference in the internal affairs of the Palestinian cause through the support of one party at the expense of another.

With the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, the Islamic Republic of Iran had different takes on what happened in the Middle East. When talking about Iran situation, it was possible to see how the position of Hamas differed from the Arab revolutions which affected the relationship between the former and the Islamic Republic of Iran. From the Iranian point of view, Iran's clear behavior could be seen in the fact that political selection was based purely on Shiite

religious grounds and not on an Islamic political basis in the literal sense of Islam (Payam Mohseni, 2017).

The Syrian revolution was the result of the difference in the political vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hamas. The main reason for strained relationship between the two parties, which affected the Iranian support for Hamas, forced the latter to find other assistance. Therefore, at this point it saw the nature of the alliance between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement (Napolitano, 2017).

It is common practice in international relations when an alliance is formed between two or more countries. It is an agreement between the parties to achieve certain goals by certain means by adhering to certain conditions that achieve the interests of the allied parties at the local and international levels. Each coalition will be headed by the superpowers, which will be able to put forward the political vision and to develop plans and strategies to achieve the objectives of this alliance.

As for the relationship between Iran and Hamas, it is a relationship between a state and a non-state actor. Iranian behavior is expected to be a certain Hamas behavior that is subordinate to the Iranian orders. The Hamas reaction is to make the decision according to the Palestinian national interest and not the Iranian interest. With the Iranian intervention in Syria and Yemen, the Iranian-Hamas dispute surfaced through Hamas's refusal to interfere in the internal affairs of the Arab countries, which aroused the Iranian side's irritation with Hamas behavior (Elhousseini, 2017). This paper argues the nature of the transformation in the relationship between Iran and Hamas after the Syrian revolution and the impact of this shift on the Palestinian issue.

2. Methods

This study was conducted from secondary data. The dataset consists of media, books and many articles. The researcher studied carefully the relationship between Iran and Hamas and the impact of this relationship on the Palestinian issue, in addition to studying the changes that took place in this relationship after the Arab revolutions, especially the Syrian revolution, considering that Hamas is part of the axis of resistance and what is the position of Hamas from interfering in the internal affairs of the countries Arab relations, where the relationship between Hamas and Iran is one of the international files, especially when talking about the relationship between Iran and the international community or the Palestinian file, which is also an international file.

2.1 The Iranian-Hamas Relationship after the Syrian Revolution

The Syrian revolution against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad was a turning point in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran and of Hamas. It was a change in the political map of the axis of resistance in the Middle East. When taking positions on what is happening in Syria, arose several international alliances. They fell between parties that were supposed to be allied for a long time, like the relation between the Palestinian Hamas movement and the Islamic Republic of Iran plus the Syrian regime (Nahl, 2016).

The Syrian regime with its current president, Bashar al-Assad, is an ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the political, military and religious levels. He is considered a Shiite Alawite sect in Syria. The former ruler was no one else but his father, Hafez al-Assad. Syria is part of the axis of resistance against Israel. Because of the financial, political and administrative corruption in the regime, the reaction was to deal with the local demonstrators with a military and repressive confrontation (Barfi, 2016).

The Islamic Republic of Iran's position in the revolution should be observed in Syria. It had assented the revolution in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen: the countries in which the majority of their people and their political systems are calculated throughout the year on the Arab axis of moderation. Although the majority of Syrians are Sunni, we notice in this case that Shiite Iran supported President Assad's (which is considered from same Shiite sector) position on the axis of resistance against Israel.

Palestinian Hamas movement had put themselves in silent position from the beginning of Syrian revolution, so that they have been incurred a difficult position between the Assad-led regime supporting them and the Syrians who revolted against the regime. Knowing that most of the leadership of the Political Bureau of the Palestinian Hamas movement was in Damascus, they chose to wait until the political picture in Syria was clearer (Azizi, 2015). When the events in Syria began, the regime questioned Hamas's position on what was happening in Syria. The response was that they appreciated that the regime has been of assistance to Palestinian cause and the Islamic resistance, and that they had been standing alongside Syrians and their future aspirations for political, economic and cultural development. Despite the fact that Hamas tried to mediate between the regime and its opposition to reach a compromise, President Bashar al-Assad rejected (Abuamran).

During the events, the Syrian regime asked for a meeting attended by President Assad, the leadership of the Palestinian Hamas movement, and the Lebanese Hezbollah. However, since

Hamas did not want to give an impression that they stood by Syria by attending the meeting, they advised that it should be held at an official level between Assad and President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine instead. Eventually, the meeting was canceled. During the events, the Syrian regime asked for a meeting attended by President Assad, the leadership of the Palestinian Hamas movement, and the Lebanese Hezbollah. However, since Hamas did not want to give an impression that they stood by Syria by attending the meeting, they advised that it should be held at an official level between Assad and President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine instead. Eventually, the meeting was canceled (Saleh, 2015).

After the cancellation of the meeting and the adoption military solution for the Syrian revolution, of which Hamas disapproved, the movement came up with a political solution between the Syrian parties. The decision was very difficult for Hamas and limited to either staying in Syria and aligning itself with the regime or leaving Syria to avoid the internal conflict. The second option was deemed the best for them, leaving most of the leaders and was directed to the State of Qatar (Nahl OMA, 2016).

After leaving Syria due to internal conflict, the relations between the Palestinian Hamas movement and the rest of the parties in the resistance axis, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran, were strained. It was affected by Hamas's take on the Syrian issue and its withdrawal from the country and impacted on the Iran's financial support to Hamas. Although the communication between the two sides was minimal during events in Syria, the relationship was not interrupted. From an American and Western point of view Hamas fulfilled a need for The Islamic Republic of Iran, including regarding a Palestinian paper to achieve Iranian interests, as well as an Islamic paper against the American and Israeli project in the Middle East (Saleh MM, 2015).

The nature of the relationship between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Palestinian Hamas movement is based on mutual interest. We notice the problem was in Iran's behavior and not in Hamas', so that the former views the latter as a strategic ally that cannot be abandoned but can be pressured purely to achieve Iranian interests. Accordingly, this was what happened: since Hamas did not stand by and withdrew from Syria, Iran's funding of Hamas was reduced as the punishment from both countries (AL-AWSAT A, 2017).

2.2 The Al-Saberin Movement in Palestine

One of the main consequences of the bad relationship between Hamas and Iran is Iran's attempt to find an alternative to Hamas inside the Palestinian state. The Al-Saberin movement was a Shiite sect born after it split from the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine in 2014. The

movement, which includes a group of dissidents from Islamic Jihad, was established as a future alternative to the previous movement, which serves as the military arm of Iran in the Palestinian territories (Jalal RA, 2014). The existence of this movement in the Gaza Strip was an unprecedented development under Hamas government, but it attributed the lack of consensus between the Sunni-led faction and the Islamic Republic of Iran in several issues related to the regional and international affairs. Its flag looks almost identical to that of Hezbollah in Lebanon, but in different colors.

In general, the number of Palestinians who have converted to Shi'ism is limited, especially in the Gaza Strip, compared to the ones in Bethlehem in the West Bank, where a number of families have embraced Shi'ism in the hot pursuit of associations supported by Iran. There were reports in form of photographs documenting the actions and activities of a number of organizations belong to the Al-Saberin Movement. Signs in the background clearly showed the name of Iran's former Supreme Leader, Khamenei and Khomeini, and references to the Shiite revolution in 1979. On one of the signs, it said "Congratulations to the axis of Tehran-Jerusalem" (SAUD AL-ZAHED, 2011).

There was a fundamental difference between the Shiite-led Al-Saberin in Palestine, the Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Houthis in Yemen. Hezbollah and the Houthis were popular incubators for Shiite, whereas the majority of Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, is of the Sunni Shafi'i doctrine. There is even no acceptance of the idea of Shi'ism within the Palestinian territories. That was what the Islamic Republic of Iran was trying to find in the Palestinian homeland as a substitute for the Sunni-led resistance movements.

Hamas, which controls Gaza, has allowed activists of Al-Saberin to operate in Gaza on the basis of the confrontation with the Israeli occupation and Palestinians awareness of their country's cause and its political and regional dimensions. Unfortunately, Al-Saberin exploited this permission and tried to spread Shiite doctrine in the Gaza Strip, which was rejected clearly and publicly. As the result, Hamas closed the office of Al-Saberin and prosecute its active members in Gaza, an attempt to restrict Al-Saberin's activities and work to they were trying to complete in Palestine (Zaboun K, 2016).

In an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, Hisham Salem, who is leading Al-Saberin, said he had been trying to leave Gaza for some time after he felt that his life was in real danger. Salem sent his wife and seven of his sons and daughters to the Iranian capital of Tehran to settle there and not to return to Gaza because of ongoing harassment and threats (East URa, 2016).

Iran's behavior towards Hamas indicates that it is not credible in dealing with the Palestinian file for Palestine. Its attempt to find a military arm in Palestine similar to the ones in both Lebanon and Yemen is a clear interference in Palestinian cause and internal affairs. This also indicates that Hamas is neither Iran's winning card nor following their order.

2.3 Hamas as Non-State Actor

Hamas is a Palestinian national movement with Islamic origins. It was built on the basis of fighting Israeli occupation with all forms, including armed resistance. For this reason, it has international relations supported by the Israeli occupation. Its offices have been opened in these countries, including Iran. In other words, it has become a cross-border Palestinian movement, since its activity is not confined to the Palestinian interior. It has gone beyond regional and international dimension.

It is not possible to find a comprehensive definition of the actor who represents the non-state actor. Each country in the international community has special criteria for defining it according to the nature of their relationship. However, several specific elements can be identified by defining Hamas as a non-state actor by:

- Hamas's popular base inside and outside the Palestinian territories
- The armed force possessed by Hamas to resist the Israeli occupation
- The international activity of Hamas, which affects the regional and international situation
- Its participation in the resistance alliance, which includes several regional countries as well as non-state actors.

That is why Hamas's association with Iran was strengthened after it won the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections and ever since has emerged clearly in the regional and international arena. The Hamas government has not been recognized internationally. Only a group of countries have dealt with it, including Iran.

As a result of international failure in recognizing the Hamas-led government, an internal Palestinian dispute erupted between Hamas and Fatah, leading to military takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas and the formation of another Palestinian government in the West Bank.

After the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, Hamas moved from a non-state actor to be the Palestinian government. The so-called resistance government, in other words, combined political and armed resistance to fight against Israeli occupation. It did not satisfy President of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas. Iran sided with Hamas instead of Fatah, which led to the administrative divisions of the Palestinian territories through Hamas's military takeover of the

Gaza Strip and the departure of the Palestinian National Authority to Ramallah. Soon after, a new Palestinian government was formed in Ramallah and was internationally recognized. Hamas was once again transformed from an active government agency into a non-state actor (Lele A, 2006).

Hamas was considered a non-state actor at the regional and international levels, and also by its participation in the axis of resistance led by Iran and in Lebanese Hezbollah, the Syrian regime, and Yemeni Houthi. The Iranian support for Hamas is one of the most important issues related to Iran and the international community especially when negotiating the Iranian nuclear file among international parties.

2.4 Iranian Behavior and Its Impact on the Palestinian Cause

The Iranian side sees the Palestinian issue as an important issue at the regional and international levels, in addition to the importance of the issue to the Arabs and Muslims. Since Khomeini came to power in Iran, he tried to have a place, a decision or an opinion within the Palestinian cause. The opportunity was seized when the alliance between Iran and Hamas was supported financially and militarily. The relationship between Hamas and Iran was characterized by the Arabs' bias towards the option of peace, which was considered the strategic option for solving the Palestinian issue.

Which is rejected by Hamas and with Iran, where Hamas believes that the resistance in all its forms and types legitimate against the Israeli occupation, including armed resistance, which negatively affected the relationship between Hamas and Arab countries, which led to a lack of attention to the Palestinian issue and reduce Arab support for them. Especially since the relationship between Iran and the Gulf states is very tense.

Iran's goal has been to export the Islamic revolution to the rest of the Middle East through the spread of Shiite thought in the Arab countries with a majority Sunni, and looking at the axis of the resistance believes that most of the parties in this axis from Shiite doctrine, except the movement of Hamas Sunni, and here comes the problem as it is a problem Religious and political relations between Arab countries and Iran, Hamas tried to balance between two sides but its attempts did not work, in addition to Iran's behavior in interfering in the affairs of Arab countries such as Syria and Yemen gave a negative impression of the vision of Arabs and Muslims to Iran and its allies, including Hamas.

3. Conclusion

The Hamas-Iran relationship is based on the principle of mutual interests. Hamas's decision stems from the Palestinian national interest, and because Hamas is committed to the principle of national decision-making, this has strained relations with Iran, especially in regional files, including the Yemeni and Syrian ones.

Because of Hamas's take on Syrian revolution, the dispute with the axis of resistance appeared on the surface. The leader of Hamas had been in exile in Qatar, Iran reduced financial and military support for Hamas, and the establishment of a Shiite movement in Gaza similar to Lebanese Hezbollah.

The axis of the resistance is based on a Shiite religious basis, as the Islamic Republic of Iran, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and Lebanese Hezbollah are, and believe in the doctrine of the governance of the jurist. The Shiite-led Yemeni group, Houthi, was added to the axis later on. Wilayat-el-Faqih sparked a fundamental debate on the allegiance of Shiite-led communities all over Arab world, whether loyalty to the homeland or to Imam.

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