

# Hamas aligns itself with US imperialism against Syria, Iran

Sahand Avedis  
1 March 2012

Hamas leader Ismail Haniya delivered a speech last Friday at Al-Azhar mosque in Cairo endorsing the Western-backed opposition in Syria and thereby confirming speculation in recent months that the Palestinian Islamist movement has found new patrons among the most reactionary regimes of the Middle East. These apparently include the military junta in Egypt, the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf and Turkey.

Hamas's reorientation points ultimately toward a complete break with Iran and Syria and rapprochement with US imperialism. This aptly called "seismic" shift has already expressed itself in the most recent position of the group's leadership toward reconciliation with Fatah in the West Bank and its willingness to abandon armed struggle against Israel and ultimately endorse a two-state solution.

"I salute all the nations of the Arab Spring and I salute the heroic people of Syria who are striving for freedom, democracy and reform," declared Haniya. He was answered by worshipers, most of them supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafis, who chanted slogans against Iran and Hezbollah, which have sided with the regime of Bashar al-Assad against the Western-backed opposition in Syria.

The same day in Gaza, a senior Hamas member, Salah al-Bardaweel, told thousands of Palestinian worshippers, "No political considerations will make us turn a blind eye to what is happening on the soil of Syria."

As reported with evident satisfaction in the Western media, these remarks should be seen in light of new accommodations between Hamas, on the one hand, and Egypt's military junta and the Qatari regime, on the other, as part of US machinations to isolate Iran. The *Telegraph* on Tuesday commented on Haniya's remarks: "Choosing to make this announcement in Cairo is a strong indication that Hamas is willing to sever its old allegiances and suffer the inevitable cut in funding from Tehran in order to tie itself to the Arab world's rising power—the Muslim

Brotherhood in Egypt." Similarly a *Global Post* article on Feb 26 states that "the fact that Haniya was able to give this speech from one of Egypt's most prominent and influential mosques is remarkable in itself. It suggests the Hamas leader was given guarantees of assistance and perhaps promises of a diplomatic future in Egypt if he turned against his benefactors."

Similar pledges have been made by Qatar and Turkey, and there is speculation that either Egypt, Qatar or Jordan would host Hamas headquarters once it was moved from Syria permanently. Just this week, Qatar pledged a \$250 million aid package for reconstruction in Gaza.

Hamas's presence in Syria dates back to 1999, when the Jordanian monarchy expelled it in a bid to strengthen the position of its rival, the Fatah leadership in the PLO, in the so-called peace process. Syria, which had historically opposed any settlement between Palestinian groups and Israel on the basis of a two-state solution, provided the group with logistical and financial support. It had done the same with other tendencies in the PLO's "rejectionist" camp in 1988, the year Yasser Arafat recognized the state of Israel.

The Israeli media closely covered the remarks of Haniya. *Haaretz*, in an article headlined "Hamas ditches Assad, backs Syria revolt," hailed the reorientation of Hamas away from Syria [and Iran] as a weakening of the "anti-Israeli axis."

Even prior to these remarks, there were strong indications that Hamas was willing to abandon its previous allies as well as its seemingly more militant posture toward Israel in exchange for recognition by the West. Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal, at a meeting in November with the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, indicated that Hamas would stop the armed struggle and pursue a policy of non-violent resistance. The UAE daily, the *National*, wrote in this regard, "Although Hamas's outgoing leader, Khaled Meshaal,

has toned down the group's stance towards Israel, it is still far from certain if Hamas would be accepted by Washington and the West. This would probably require Hamas to recognise Israel's right to exist."

In a related development, the Hamas leadership has started negotiations with Fatah for a unity government. The deal was brokered on February 5 by Qatar, which has had close diplomatic and economic ties with Israel. The post of premier in such a government is reserved for Abbas, who would serve also in his current capacity as the president. There were initial disagreements between the Hamas leadership in exile and Haniya's administration in Gaza, which saw the deal as too much of a compromise by Meshaal. But, as it became clear last week in Cairo, all top Hamas leaders are now on board.

Around the same time, Haniya took a tour of the Arab monarchies begging for aid. The *Boston Globe* reported, "Even as Qatar was mediating the unity deal [between Meshaal and Abbas], the Hamas prime minister of Gaza, Ismail Haniya, was leading his own tour through wealthy Gulf states Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. *His tone was far more CEO than anti-Israel firebrand* as he met Gulf rulers and investment groups about pumping money into struggling Gaza." [emphasis added]

Another significant aspect of Haniya's tour was his cordial meeting with Bahrain's King Hamad in which Haniya tacitly endorsed the brutal crackdown against the ongoing uprising by the predominantly Shia population against his Sunni monarchical regime. Haniya asserted that "Bahrain is a red line that cannot be compromised because it is an Arab Islamic State."

Haniya had been asked in Doha to skip the last stop in his trip in the Persian Gulf, which was Tehran, in an effort to undercut the influence of Iran on the Palestinian issue. He finally met with Ayatollah Khamenei in Tehran on Feb 12.

Haniya's tour of the reactionary sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf prompted angry comments in the Iranian media. Hasan Hanizadeh, an analyst of Middle Eastern affairs who frequently appears on Arab channels, called Haniya's tour an "end to Hamas." He clarified, "Hamas is stepping in the same path that Yasser Arafat did and that is the path of reconciliation."

The *Jerusalem Post* reported in December in an article titled "Islamic Jihad rise in Gaza challenges Hamas rule" that Iran "with Hamas out of its orbit, has upped its support of Islamic Jihad, which, according to some estimates, has a rocket arsenal that competes in its quantity and quality with that in Hamas's warehouses."

Islamic Jihad is the only major group in Gaza that has openly sided with Syria. Its leader, Ramazan Abdollah, traveled to Iran and met with Ayatollah Khamenei in February and condemned the events in Syria as a US plot.

Similarly, Syria is throwing its support behind the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), which has some following within the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria, to offset the loss of Hamas.

In the final analysis, Hamas represents a rival faction of the Palestinian bourgeoisie. Its reactionary program of a capitalist Islamic state has proven no more capable of fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the Palestinian masses than the policies of the PLO leadership, whose betrayals led to the Islamist group's rise. Under conditions in which Washington is backing similar groups in Libya and Syria, while making approaches to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hamas—like Fatah before it—sees realignment with imperialism and its Arab allies as a better means of securing its interests against the threat of a revolt from below by the Palestinian masses.

As for the other organizations to which Iran and Syria are apparently shifting their support, apart from the limited influence they enjoy among millions of Palestinians in occupied Palestine and in the refugee camps throughout the Middle East, they have no more in the way of a political program to combat the imperialist intrigues in the region than the bourgeois regimes in Tehran and Damascus themselves.

Such a struggle can be waged only on the basis of a socialist program to unite the working class across national boundaries and all religious and ethnic divides for the defeat of imperialism and the establishment of workers governments throughout the region.



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