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## **FALLOUT OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS FOR HAMAS AS A NON-STATE ARMED ACTOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

The Arab uprisings, which started in 2011 and have shaken the regional status quo are now late 2013 countered by the very forces they were trying to remove. The developments, which have taken place in the last three years significantly influenced positioning of all the state and non-state actors in the Middle East. Much attention has been given to changing fortunes of the fallen or the still ruling regimes in the region, however less to armed non-state actors, such as Hamas. The present article attempts to fill this gap by outlining the position of Hamas before the Arab uprisings and examining how they influenced its standing. The two uprisings, which directly and most significantly affected Hamas were the uprising of Egyptian people and the uprising of Syrian people. The transfiguring situation has not only put the organisation in motion, but also spotlighted its internal divisions. The future that lies ahead is not clear, as Hamas finds itself in a complex regional environment with a number of opportunities and even more challenges to be faced.

### **Hamas before the Arab uprisings**

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmīyah), Hamas, has been developing and redeveloping its structure and political aims since its establishment in December 1987,

at the very beginning of the Palestinian uprising (intifāḍah), as the organizational expression of Muslim Brotherhood participation in the anti-Israeli resistance after two decades of Islamic political quietism.<sup>1</sup>

Hamas was never part of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) – created in 1964 and recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people by majority of states, nor its legislative body the Palestinian National Council (PNC). It was rather engaged in competition and later in open hostilities with the PLO, especially its main and most powerful wing – Fatah.<sup>2</sup>

Learning from the experience of its main Palestinian rival, Hamas has always been very careful not to ruin its relations with powerful regional sponsors. The 1990 Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait had Yaser Arafat, the leader of Fatah and the PLO, throwing in his lot with Iraq and isolating the Gulf countries. Thus, Hamas was presented with a real dilemma:

The Gulf sheikhdoms had provided major funding over the years, but Palestinian grass-roots sentiment was deeply hostile to the perceived corruption and wasteful opulence of the 'oil sheikhs'. Hamas sought safety by calling [...] for the withdrawal of foreign forces from the Gulf, evacuation of the Iraqi army from Kuwait, and freedom for the Kuwaitis to choose their own future. Hamas was rewarded with continued financial assistance, unlike the PLO, which suffered a total cut off.<sup>3</sup>

Receiving of 'oil money' had to be balanced with the movement's rhetoric: hitherto vowing upon Arab Muslims to join its struggle against Israel, but also to turn against their rulers, especially secular Arab dictators, who – according to Hamas – had no respect of Muslim values, served the Western and Israeli interests, as well as abandoned the Palestinian people, which was all not very far from what the Gulf monarchies engaged themselves in.

For a number of years, in the 1990s, Hamas had offices, its political bureau, in Jordan. However, in 1999 the organization was banned by the Jordanian authorities reportedly under the United States, Israel and the Palestinian Authority pressure. It soon resettled its offices to Damascus. Syrian regime and Hamas had shared an animosity towards PLO headed by Yaser Arafat, especially since his signing of the Oslo Accords with Israel in 1993 – strongly rejected by both. With time Hamas became an important element of the so called resistance axis of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah, enjoying their support and funding.

In 2006 Hamas won elections in the occupied Palestinian territories. Its victory was not accepted neither by the rival Fatah, which for the first time in history was not granted power by the Palestinian people, nor by Israel and the Western

<sup>1</sup> J.-F. Legarin, "Hamas", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 2, ed. J. Esposito, Oxford 1995, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> For the details of the Hamas-PLO/Fatah relation see: Y. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State. The Palestinian National Movement 1949–1993*, Oxford 2004, pp. 650–653.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 651.

powers. A year later Fatah with Israeli and American backing launched fratricidal fight against Hamas. In result, the Islamic movement lost the control over the West Bank to Fatah, but managed to keep the Gaza Strip. Its new role of the government in Gaza was further complicated by its military activity against Israel, as well as Israel's attacks on the territory, especially December 2008 – January 2009 Israel's war on Gaza. Notably, it was not only Israel, but also Egypt tightening its grip on the Gaza Strip by gradually closing and isolating it.

In this circumstances the organisation's base in Damascus proved to be of vital importance. Eventually, Hamas has had four main branches: (1) Hamas in Gaza led by Ismail Haniyeh, (2) Hamas in the West Bank, (3) Hamas in Israeli prisons, (4) Hamas in exile led by Khaled Meshal with Musa Abu Marzouq as his deputy. On the strategic regional and international level decisions have been taken by the Hamas in exile branch, however position of the leadership in Gaza has been of importance. The other two branches – the West Bank branch and the prison branch – suppressed and weakened by both the Palestinian Authority and the Israelis have not had that much say.<sup>4 5</sup>

Nonetheless, at end of 2010 the movement found itself in stalemate.

In the stagnant years preceding [Arab uprisings], [Hamas] had been at an impasse: isolated diplomatically; caged in economically by Egypt and Israel; crushed by Israeli and Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank; warily managing an unstable ceasefire with a far more powerful adversary; incapable of fulfilling popular demands for reconciliation with Fatah; and more or less treading water in Gaza, where some supporters saw it as having sullied itself with the contradictions of being an Islamist movement constricted by secular governance and a resistance movement actively opposing Gaza-based attacks against Israel.<sup>6</sup>

It has all changed from the very onset of the following year.

### **Fallout of the Arab uprisings for Hamas**

The 2011 uprising in Syria turned out to be a serious game changer and made Hamas eventually leave the country losing both its base and its main sponsor – Iran. The fall of Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and electoral victory of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 significantly improved the situation and opened a lot of new doors for Hamas, both its Gaza and the exiled branch. It was the case, however, only until July 2013, when president Mohamed Morsi, hailing from the Muslim Brotherhood, was removed from power. Cairo could no longer serve as a new regional base of Hamas, as was Damascus for over a decade, nor Gaza could enjoy its opening to the world via Egypt any more.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Chehab, *Hamas: The Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies*, London 2007.

<sup>5</sup> K. Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide*, London 2006.

<sup>6</sup> *Light at the End of their Tunnels? Hamas and the Arab Uprisings*. *International Crisis Group*, "Middle East Report" 2012, No. 129, p. i.

Hamas has been searching again for a safe seat in the region and a sponsor as generous and flexible as Iran used to be. First, the Syrian uprising and its repercussions for Hamas will be examined, then, the effects of the Egyptian uprising and its reversal for the Islamic movement will be reviewed.

### Uprising in Syria and the loss of a patron

Hamas' alliance with the Syrian regime was in its big part owing to the traditional Damascus opposition to Yaser Arafat and the PLO – dating back to the early 1970s. Syria on the one hand hosted a big share of Palestinian refugees (over half a million people today), on the other the country's previous long-term ruler Hafez al-Asad systematically used the Palestinian resistance as a political tool and ensured that no independent Palestinian power centre emerged in the region, since it could have challenged his hegemonic position. He instigated divisions and created its own Palestinian proxies (the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, Fatah al-Intifada, Sa'iqa), as well as backed assaults on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon during the country's civil war.<sup>7</sup> His ambition of being the regional preeminent figure was not to be reconciled with the PLO's strive for independence of Palestinian decision-making from external influence (al-qarar al-philastini al-mustaqil).<sup>8</sup> This policy was only strengthened after Yaser Arafat signed on behalf of PLO the Oslo Accords with Israel in 1993.

In response Damascus formed the Alliance of Palestinian Forces (APF) comprising of democratic, nationalist and Islamist Palestinian factions, with Hamas among the last-mentioned.<sup>9</sup> Its primary purpose was to derail the Oslo-based peace process and to let the Syrian regime feel in control of the Palestinian issues. Although, activities of the Alliance were limited to coordination of rhetoric, it was the reason behind Hamas' early presence in Damascus until its official transfer to the Syrian capital at the end of the 1990s. Hosting of the Islamic movement, the

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<sup>7</sup> M. Qandil, *The Syrian Revolution and the Palestinian Refugees in Syria: Realities and risks, Palestinian Refugees in the Arab World – Reality and Prospects*, AlJazeera Center for Studies, Doha 2012, p. 2–3.

<sup>8</sup> R. Khalidi, *The Assad Regime and the Palestinian Resistance*, "Arab Studies Quarterly" 1984, Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 259–267.

<sup>9</sup> The democratic factions in the Alliance view the Palestinian struggle as a part of the international socialist struggle against imperialism and capitalism. They include: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFPL), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Palestinian Revolutionary Communist Party (PRCP). The nationalist factions in the Alliance emphasize the singularity of the Palestinian problem. They include: the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF), the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF), Fatah al-Intifada, Sa'iqa. The Islamist factions in the Alliance pursue Islamic solutions to the Palestinian problem. They include: the Movement of Islamic Jihad in Palestine (Islamic Jihad), the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). A. Strindberg, *The Damascus-Based Alliance of Palestinian Forces: A Primer*, "Journal of Palestine Studies" 2000, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 63–74.

Palestinian branch of Muslim Brotherhood, membership in which is punishable by death in Syria, allowed the Syrian regime to gain some credibility with major parts of its own society and the region. Simultaneously,

the 'de-Palestinization' of the Palestinian issue in the 2000s, directly associated with the progressive fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement and the failures of the peace process, allowed regional states like Syria and Iran to claim 'guardianship' of the Palestinian cause.<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, Palestinian factions' presence in Syria has been based on the condition of their loyalty and de facto dependence from the Syrian regime. Nonetheless, Hamas thanks to its own direct relation with Iran, and – contrary to other Damascus-based factions – its presence and popular support in the occupied Palestinian territory, enjoyed a fair degree of independence from the Syrian regime.

In early 2011 Hamas had reportedly warned the regime of possibility of Syrians taking to the streets and advised it to introduce reforms. Later in the year, when protest were going on, a number of regional figures were to suggest that Hamas negotiates between the Syrian regime and mainly Sunni opposition, however this was rejected by the regime.<sup>11</sup> The Syrian uprising put the Damascus-based Palestinian factions in an extremely difficult position, with Palestinians in Syria feeling for the Syrian uprising and the regime requesting their public support. Hamas, as it was striving to remain – in its own words – neutral, that means silent, was asked to issue a statement against sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, a Sunni cleric close to the Muslim Brotherhood who openly criticises the regime in Damascus. Hamas refused, only to find itself under intensified regime pressure: some of its offices were closed and property confiscated. Hamas insisted that it cannot take any position on the Syrian affairs. "It is the movement's policy not to [officially] oppose any government, neither to interfere in its affairs", as claimed by Yasser Azzam, Head of Refugee Affairs Bureau of Hamas in Beirut<sup>12</sup>.

However, with all the branches of Muslim Brotherhood and regional Sunni power-houses (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey) supporting a popular anti-regime struggle, and the Shia alliance (Iran, with Hezbollah) supporting the brutal regime Hamas could not have remained where it was without taking any position. Neutrality was no longer an option.

The movement had to weigh, on the one hand, its gratitude to a regime that had supported it strongly when nearly all other Arab countries had shunned it, and, on the other, its connection to fellow Sunni Muslims who were victims of violence perpetuated by predominantly Alawite security forces and other supporters of President Bashar al-Asad's regime. Likewise, it had to take into account ties to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, membership in which the regime had made punishable by death; obligations to Syria's hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees, who

<sup>10</sup> E. Mohns, A. Bank, *Syrian Revolt Fallout: End of the Resistance Axis?*, "Middle East Policy" 2012, Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Light at the End of their Tunnels...*, p. 5–7.

<sup>12</sup> M. Qandil, *The Syrian Revolution and the Palestinian Refugees in Syria...*, p. 6.

could pay with their homes and lives for the decisions made by some of their political leaders; and indebtedness to the Syrian people, who had stood with the movement and even offered some \$20 million in aid to Gaza during the 2008–2009 war.<sup>13</sup>

In late 2011 and early 2012 upper and middle ranks of Hamas leadership left Syria quietly. The organisation remained silent about its departure and its position on the Syrian uprising until late 2012, when Khaled Meshal addressed it at a press conference in Cairo.<sup>14</sup> Meshal announced that the Islamic movement is grateful to both Syria and Iran for the years of their support, and it did not wish to turn its back on them, however it disagrees with the approach adopted by Iran to the popular uprising in Syria and the Syrian government's resorting to the security-military option.<sup>15</sup> As explained by Yasser Azzam, "any [further than this] position taken by Hamas would harm the Palestinians in Syria. Thus, the movement's [discretion] is the best protection for them."<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the Syrian regime was not prevented from attacking the refugee camps and putting their population under sever siege, nor from killing dozens if not hundreds of Palestinians of Syria, as much as it did not hesitate to kill hundreds of thousands of Syrians.<sup>17</sup>

The effort of Khaled Meshal not to burn all its bridges by leaving Syria did not really succeed, especially that he moved, at least temporarily, to Qatar. In April this year, after Meshal's re-election as head of Hamas's politburo, *Al-Thawra Daily*, Syrian regime-controlled newspaper, commented:

Today, as Meshal becomes the head of Hamas for the fifth time... the West Bank, Gaza and the whole of occupied Palestine have no reason to celebrate (...) [Meshal] cannot believe his luck. After an acclaimed history of struggle, he has returned to the safe Qatari embrace, wealthy and fattened in the age of the Arab Spring's storms.

It concluded that Hamas has shifted "the gun from the shoulder of resistance [against Israel] to the shoulder of compromise", as referred by the Lebanese *The Daily Star* newspaper quoting after AFP.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Light at the End of their Tunnels...*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> The exception was the 24<sup>th</sup> February 2012 speech of Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas prime minister in Gaza, at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, in which he had thrown his support behind the Syrian people. It was later claimed by Hamas senior officials that this move was not agreed with the head of of Hamas' political bureau, Khaled Meshal and was rather the prime minister's own initiative.

<sup>15</sup> I. Al-Amin, *Gaza: What strategy for the resistance?*, "Al-Akhbar English", 20 November 2012, [www.english.al-akhbar.com/node/14010](http://www.english.al-akhbar.com/node/14010) [30.09.2013].

<sup>16</sup> M. Qandil, *The Syrian Revolution and the Palestinian Refugees in Syria...*, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> P. Wood, *Syria must allow aid convoys to starving civilians, says US*, BBC, 19 October 2013, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24590085](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24590085).

<sup>18</sup> *Syria slams Hamas head Meshal after re-election*, "The Daily Star", 3 April 2013, [www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Apr-03/212437-syria-slams-hamas-head-meshaal-after-re-election.ashx7](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Apr-03/212437-syria-slams-hamas-head-meshaal-after-re-election.ashx7) [30.09.2013].

The divorce from the regime in Damascus meant not only loss of a base – vital for Hamas regional and international functioning, but even more importantly loss of Iran's financial backing – essential for upholding Hamas' economic capacity to rule over the Gaza Strip, as much as training and weapons supplies.<sup>19</sup>

### Uprising in Egypt and reversal of fortunes

Before the 2011 uprising in Egypt, the long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak and its security apparatus had always favoured the secular Fatah over Hamas with its strong links to Egypt's own suppressed Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, in that period, Hamas was almost completely stranded in the 365 square kilometres of the Gaza Strip. The 2006 electoral victory and the new role of the government responsible for 1,7 million inhabitants of the tiny piece of land was not easy to reconcile with the militant rhetoric and the terrorist suicide bombing recent past. The challenge was not only how to feed Gaza, but also how to deal with more radical armed movements launching rockets on Israel – activity Hamas was not so long ago all involved in. Hamas must have appreciated that being a resistance movement is most probably easier to manage than being the government. The dreadful reality of Gaza could have always been blamed on Israel and the collaborating Arab regimes, Egypt especially, but it could not be excluded that people of Gaza turn their anger over their gruesome fate on Hamas as the ruling power.

With the fall of Mubarak in 2011 and Muslim Brotherhood winning the parliamentary (Freedom and Justice Party) and presidential (Mohamed Morsi) elections in 2012, the whole new era for Hamas and for the people of the Gaza Strip has started. As Muslim Brotherhood was gaining more influence, Hamas situation was improving. Nonetheless much of the security apparatus in Egypt was still in the hands of people connected with the old regime, thus the fallout of their struggle with the Brotherhood was to shape Hamas fortunes.

As early as in June 2011 Egypt had agreed to allow 550 people a day to leave Gaza and to lengthen the operating hours of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt. The progress was slow but meaningful. The change in Hamas situation, at least its Gaza branch, was best portrayed by juxtaposition of two pictures of Gaza prime minister Ismail Haniyeh: one taken in December 2006, another – in February 2012.

In [the former], taken after the Egyptian government denied him entry to Gaza, Haniyeh crouches alone at night on the curb outside the Rafah crossing, hugging himself to keep warm in the winter air; in [the later], he smiles broadly as members of the crowd at Al-Azhar grasp and carry him aloft.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> E. Mohns, A. Bank, *Syrian Revolt Fallout...*, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> *Light at the End of their Tunnels...*, p. 4.



The two photos are believed to portray Hamas situation before and after the Arab uprisings. Haniyeh's 2012 visit at Al-Azhar was part of his – first since 2007 – regional tour that included stops in Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Tunisia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Iran. In many of these countries he was received not as a Hamas leader but as a prime minister – to the irritation of Fatah officials in Ramallah. Other Gaza officials and parliamentarians alike were allowed to leave the Strip in order to pay official visits for the first time in several years since the siege. A number of high level delegations visited Gaza – including Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani in October 2012. The crowning moment came in December 2012, when Khaled Meshal was allowed for the first time in his life to enter Gaza for the celebration of Hamas 25th anniversary. With him came official delegations from Indonesia, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Jordan, and Egypt. Hamas was not diplomatically isolated any longer.<sup>21</sup>

The head of the movement Khaled Meshal after his final departure from Damascus in January 2012 kept shuttling between the capitals of Qatar and Egypt in a clear sign where Hamas' new allegiances lie. His deputy Musa Abu Marzouq, who also used to be based in Damascus, opened an office in Cairo. Hamas representatives were received by the Egyptian government officials and the president himself.<sup>22</sup>

For most of the 2012, the relation between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was at least correct and at best cordial, although it was not as fruitful as Hamas might have wished for. The Brotherhood stance vis-à-vis Israel was being internally debated. The popular sentiment among regular party members and even parliamentarians was openly anti-Israeli: in March 2012, the Egyptian People's Assembly, in which the Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won a major share of seats, unanimously voted to freeze all sales of Egyptian gas to Israel, expel the Israeli ambassador and embark on reversal of Egypt's policy vis-à-vis Israel.<sup>23</sup> The leadership, however, had to take more conciliatory and cooperative approach towards Israel were they to stay in power and in good relations with Egypt's main financial backer – the United States. They confirmed that as members of the governing party they will honour Egypt's 1979 Peace Accord with Israel. Further, the Brotherhood leadership continued the Mubarak regime's initiative of brokering the reconciliation talks between Hamas in Gaza and Fatah ruling over the West Bank. With this goal in view, they were trying to position themselves in an equal distance from both Palestinian parties. "Any movement on the side of the Muslim Brotherhood when it is in the opposition is one thing and then when it comes to power it is something completely different", explained at the time Reda Fahmy, a Brotherhood leader who oversees its Palestinian relations in an interview for The

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> O. Shaaban, *Hamas and Morsi: Not So Easy Between Brothers*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 1 October 2012. [www.carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=49525](http://www.carnegie-mec.org/publications/?fa=49525) [30 September 2013].

<sup>23</sup> *Light at the End of their Tunnels...*, p. 3–4.



New York Times.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the Islamist Egyptian government's neutrality between Hamas and Fatah was a shift from Mubarak's policy of exclusive support for the Western-backed Fatah movement and its willingness to participate in peace talks with Israel.

On the top of its relations with the United States, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority, the Brotherhood had to take into account the internal pressures from its opponents, who accused Hamas of being a secret armed force of the Islamist president allegedly used by him to quell any dissent. In the media Hamas was being blamed for the volatile situation in the Sinai Peninsula and all the jihadi activity there, including the killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers in August 2012 and following events.<sup>25</sup>

It was clear at that point that Hamas had made a mistake:

in the post-Mubarak era, it failed to properly exploit its room to manoeuvre in the Egyptian provinces. That is, it did not take the trouble to communicate effectively with the other elements of the Egyptian revolution – the secularists, the leftists, and the nationalists. This caused its stock to fall somewhat in the Egyptian street, even among those supporting a military posture toward Israel. Without intending to do so, it appeared that Hamas had injected itself into an internal Egyptian political dispute.<sup>26</sup>

The new government wary of accusations against Hamas took even greater distance from it, as its own position was endangered.

The situation has changed dramatically with the 3rd July 2013 military-backed coup d'état, which removed Mohamed Morsi from power and opened the way for a crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. Since then, Hamas has been regularly accused in the Egyptian state media of having its fighters among the Jihadists operating in the Sinai Peninsula, training the Jihadists, as well as providing them with safe haven and letting them enter Sinai through the tunnels connecting it with Gaza.<sup>27</sup> Hamas repeatedly denied the accusations. Nonetheless, the Egyptian security forces have not only stepped up their crackdown on extremists operating in the Sinai Peninsula, but also closed the Rafah crossing and launched themselves on closing or destroying of the underground tunnels.

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<sup>24</sup> D. D. Kirkpatrick, *Islamist Victors in Egypt Seeking Shift by Hamas*, "The New York Times", 24 March 2012, [www.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/world/middleeast/egypts-election-victors-seek-shift-by-hamas-to-press-israel.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/world/middleeast/egypts-election-victors-seek-shift-by-hamas-to-press-israel.html) [30.09.2013].

<sup>25</sup> *16 Egyptian soldiers killed at Israel border*, "Ahran Online", 5 August 2012, [www.english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49660/Egypt/Politics-/UPDATE---Egyptian-soldiers-killed-at-the-Israel-bo.aspx](http://www.english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/49660/Egypt/Politics-/UPDATE---Egyptian-soldiers-killed-at-the-Israel-bo.aspx) [30.09.2013]; D. D. Kirkpatrick, *Egypt Reports Gains Against Militants in Sinai*, "The New York Times", 15 September 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/09/16/world/middleeast/egypts-military-claims-gains-against-militants-in-sinai.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/16/world/middleeast/egypts-military-claims-gains-against-militants-in-sinai.html) [30.09.2013].

<sup>26</sup> A. Abu Amer, *Hamas Changing Role in Egypt*, "Al-Monitor", 5 April 2013, [www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/hamas-egypt-gaza-relations-change.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/hamas-egypt-gaza-relations-change.html) [30.09.2013].

<sup>27</sup> For further reading on the issue of tunnels and their transformation from a clandestine, makeshift operation into a major commercial enterprise benefiting Hamas see: N. Pelham, *Gaza's Tunnel Phenomenon: The Unintended Dynamics of Israel's Siege*, "Journal of Palestine Studies" 2012, Vol. XLI, No. 4.

With Egypt's military crackdown, Mr Morsi in detention and the Brotherhood leadership either locked up, dead or in hiding, smuggling between Gaza and Egypt has come to a virtual halt. That means no access to building materials, fuel that costs less than half as much as that imported from Israel, and many other cheap commodities Gazans had come to rely on.<sup>28</sup>

The Hamas-ruled territory is reportedly facing a \$250 million shortfall, while deprived of significant tax revenue Hamas government does not have neither old nor new patrons behind its back.<sup>29</sup> Its most crucial long-time sponsor Iran has now started channelling funds to Islamic Jihad, an extremist militant group, which did not broke its ties with Damascus.<sup>30</sup>

### Internal divisions during the Arab uprisings

The Arab uprisings not only changed the regional environment, in which Hamas operates, but also brought to the spotlight preexisting internal differences within the movement. The main point of contention between the exiled and the Gaza-based leaderships during that period was national reconciliation and a host of issues related to it.

The contest within Hamas has played out most vividly and publicly over the issue of Palestinian reconciliation, which touches on many of the most important strategic questions faced by the movement, including coexistence with Israel, conditions for accepting a state on the pre-1967 borders, nonviolence, integration within the PLO, the functions of the Palestinian Authority, the status of security forces in the West Bank and Gaza and the formation of a joint national strategy with Fatah.<sup>31</sup>

As the Arab uprisings made the Middle Eastern actors listen carefully to popular demands or be removed from power, both Hamas and Fatah understood that they have no other choice but to sit together and finish with the internal divisions and fratricidal fight, because this is what the Palestinian people – both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – expect them to do. A number of Fatah-Hamas meetings took place, reconciliation agreements were signed: agreement in Cairo in May 2011 and agreement between Abbas and Meshal in Doha in February 2012.<sup>32</sup> At both

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<sup>28</sup> J. Rudoren, *Pressures Rises on Hamas as Patrons Support Fades*, "The New York Times", 23 August 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/08/24/world/middleeast/pressure-mounts-on-hamas-as-economic-lifelines-are-severed.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/24/world/middleeast/pressure-mounts-on-hamas-as-economic-lifelines-are-severed.html?pagewanted=all) [30.09.2013].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> F. Akram, *In Gaza, Iran Finds an Ally More Agreeable Than Hamas*, "The New York Times", 31 July 2013, [www.nytimes.com/2013/08/01/world/middleeast/in-gaza-iran-finds-a-closer-ally-than-hamas.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/01/world/middleeast/in-gaza-iran-finds-a-closer-ally-than-hamas.html) [30.09.2013].

<sup>31</sup> *Light at the End of their Tunnels...*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> The terms of Doha reconciliation meeting included: reconstruction of Gaza with \$1 billion contribution from Qatar, reform of the PLO's legislative body, legislative and presidential elections, formation of a Abbas-led government of technocrats.

occasions Khaled Meshal made declarations, which have not been consulted with the rest of Hamas leadership. Its members, both in the West Bank and Gaza, not only disagreed with Meshal, but did not hide it from the public. One of them, in an interview with International Crisis Group, commented on Meshal's increasing unilateralism:

Hamas does everything by SMS now. Someone recently joked that we used to be 'HMS' [the root of "Hamas" in Arabic] but have now become 'SMS'. We used to sit and discuss, but now Meshal sends an SMS to inform us of a decision, and we send back an SMS with our reservations. There's a lot less listening to one another.<sup>33</sup>

The main line of division runs between the leadership constrained in the Gaza Strip and observing the region from that perspective and the leadership in exile not constrained by any location but finding it more and more difficult to settle in one. Gaza leadership hopeful by seeing fellow Muslim Brothers winning elections all over the region did not want to give up easily to Fatah-Israel-US demands, while the exiled leadership was ready to greater concessions towards the rival Palestinian faction and its backers. It was the latter that have more say. Nonetheless, the reconciliation has not taken any shape so far, while the popular demand remains unmet as the region is entering post-uprisings era.

### **Where to after the Arab uprisings?**

The Arab uprisings turned the tables for Hamas a number of times testing the movement's ability to react and adapt. It proved itself as being flexibility and able to take risks in order to progress, i.e. by breaking the allegiance to Syria and Iran. However, it may be also argued that the decision to lose a base (Syria) and a patron (Iran) was rather a must than a choice. In January 2012, when Khaled Meshal was leaving Damascus, the region seemed to be on a Sunni tide with Islamists winning elections in a number of a countries that had just gone through popular uprisings and Sunni power-houses supporting the insurgents. In circumstances of sectarian polarisation and divisions brought to the forefront especially by the situation in Syria, an Islamist movement, like Hamas, must have been under enormous pressure to join the Sunni camp (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan) by dissociating itself from the Shia alliance (Iran, Syria, Hezbollah), where it was an odd element according to sectarian logic.<sup>34</sup> It appeared, at that point, that Hamas departure from 'the axis of resistance' is to be compensated by new alliances in the Sunni block, in particular with Egypt and Qatar.

These predictions proved to be unattainable, when significant changes took place in both countries in late June and early July this year: the Emir of Qatar han-

<sup>33</sup> *Light at the End of their Tunnels*..., p. 23.

<sup>34</sup> B. F. Salloukh, *The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East*, "The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs" 2013, No. 48, p. 32–46.

ded power to his son, who seems to have less sympathy for Islamic movements than his father had; the Islamist president in Egypt was removed from power by military coup d'état. The region is not any more on a Sunni tide, especially with the uprising in Syria turning into a Sunni-Shia civil war and losing its popular momentum. The new constellation of power, still in the making, has made Hamas an orphan, as some analysts put it. The organisation, which during the Arab uprisings seemed to be destined to flourish after the years of stagnation and closure, is now on the road and in search of a new external base. From its point of view it is necessary that it finds one, as being a non-state actor without a strong patron makes it, even if more independent, much more vulnerable. The challenge is huge, as the possible options are closing down: Qatar might not be a feasible choice, while Egypt in its current predicament is clearly an impossible choice. There are some suggestion in the media that Hamas might have no better option than Sudan.<sup>35</sup>

Wherever the organisation's external leadership will head, it may not be possible for it anymore to make decisions without taking into account the Gaza leadership already unhappy with the current modalities of decision-making. It will also have a weight for the undergoing struggle between Sunni power-houses and Iran – both sides might be inclined to pull Hamas to its side. Least but not last, the organisation's positioning itself on the regional scene will not be without a meaning for the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the fortunes of the American-sponsored peace process.

### **Hamas a rewolty w krajach arabskich 2011–2013**

Rewolty, które wybuchły w 2011 r. i wstrząsnęły regionalnym *status quo*, obecnie są w fazie odwrotu z powodu naporu tych samych sił, które próbowały obalić. Wydarzenia na Bliskim Wschodzie z ostatnich trzech lat mają znaczący wpływ na położenie wszystkich państwowych i pozapaństwowych aktorów w regionie. W artykule uwaga została poświęcona zmiennym losom reżimów – tak upadłych, jak i tych wciąż rządzących, znacznie mniej pozapaństwowym aktorom politycznym, takim jak Hamas. Tekst jest próbą uzupełniania tego braku poprzez ukazanie Hamasu przed wybuchem rewolt w krajach arabskich oraz analizę ich wpływu na jego położenie. Dwie rewolty, które w najbardziej bezpośredni i znaczący sposób wpłynęły na sytuację ugrupowania, to powstania w Egipcie i Syrii. Przeobrażający się polityczny układ sił na Bliskim Wschodzie nie tylko wprowadził Hamas w ruch, ale też uwidatnił jego wewnętrzne podziały. Organizacja znajduje się obecnie w skomplikowanej sytuacji – pełnej zarówno możliwości, jak i wyzwań – dlatego nawet jej najbliższa przyszłość pozostaje niejasna.

**słowa kluczowe:** Hamas, Arabska Wiosna, Egipt, Syria, Strefa Gazy, Półwysep Synaj, Organizacja Wyzwolenia Palestyny, Bracia Muzułmanie

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<sup>35</sup> Q. Qassem, *Hamas politburo on the road again*, "Al-Akhbar English", 27 September 2013, [www.english.al-akhbar.com/node/17157](http://www.english.al-akhbar.com/node/17157) [30.09.2013].