



Iran-Hamas Rapprochement: the Current Situation

Overview

- ▶ In recent months **there has been a rapprochement between Iran and Hamas**, after approximately three years of difficulties caused by Hamas' reservations regarding the Syrian regime and the removal of the movement's offices from Syria. The rapprochement has been manifested by **an increasing number of visits by Hamas delegations to Iran and by public statements from senior Hamas figures about the importance of the military support Iran provides to Hamas** (See Appendices A and B).

Until recently Hamas had kept its public statements about Iranian support vague, especially military support. However, in recent months an increasing number of senior Hamas figures have made public reference to **Hamas' close relations with Iran and to the military support the Qods Force provides for Hamas. For Hamas**, Iranian military support is **particularly important at this time**. That is because of the increasing tension with Israel over the sporadic rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory in the wake of Trump's declaration and Israel's destruction of attack tunnels. **For Iran**, the Palestinian protests have provided an opportunity to promote Iran's regional interests. Thus, in ITIC assessment, **the Iranians can be expected to make an effort to exploit the opportunity and translate it into increasing military support for Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**.

Areas of Iranian support

- ▶ Iran had identified **Hamas and the PIJ** as two important factors in the Palestinian arena which it can use **to promote its regional objectives**. Providing the terrorist organizations with rockets and missiles also helps deter Israel by creating threats along Israel's northern border (Lebanon, and in the future possibly Syria as well) and southern border (the Gaza Strip).
- ▶ Iranian military support for Hamas and the PIJ has continued, with ups and downs, for the past decade, and **it is reasonable to assume that in view of recent developments, it may be manifested in four areas:**

- ◆ **Supplies of advanced weapons** (including rockets threatening central and southern Israel).
- ◆ **Transfer of funds** for the construction the organizations' military infrastructures and to continue maintaining their military forces.
- ◆ **Transfer of technological know-how** for the development and manufacture of weapons (including rockets).
- ◆ **Training operatives** (who leave the Gaza Strip for training) by the IRGC's Qods Force.

Reasons for the rapprochement

► What is behind the Hamas-Iran rapprochement? Why has Iranian support for the Palestinian terrorist organizations received so much (and such exceptional) media exposure recently? In ITIC assessment there are several possible reasons:

- ◆ **The sense of victory felt by Iran, Qassem Soleimani and the Qods Force in the era after the fall of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.** Apparently, **Iran now thinks the time is ripe to devote more attention to the Palestinian arena.** Thus Iran will make an effort **to improve the military capabilities of Hamas and the PIJ and help them increase their terrorist activities against Israel.** Hezbollah in Lebanon can be expected to follow the same policy.
- ◆ **The declaration of Donald Trump of America's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel** (December 6, 2017) **provided Iran with another opportunity to emphasize its support for the Palestinians and to join Hamas in encouraging a new intifada against Israel in Judea and Samaria.** Following Trump's declaration, **Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, spoke to senior figures in the military-terrorist wings of both Hamas and the PIJ and expressed Iran's readiness to support them in every way possible** (Tasnim, December 11, 2017; Fars, December 25, 2017).
- ◆ **Change of leadership in Hamas:** It is possible that the increase of the influence of the military-terrorist wing following the recent elections to Hamas' political bureau, especially the election of Yahya al-Sinwar to head the bureau in the Gaza Strip, also contributed to the rapprochement with Iran. Yahya al-Sinwar and other military wing

operatives are **well aware of Hamas' pressing need for Iranian military support, especially recently, in view of the growing tension between Hamas and Israel in the wake of sporadic rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territory.** The public statements about Iranian military support for Hamas are liable to indicate that the current Hamas leadership is prepared to publicly expose the military support from Iran. It may do so even at the expense of its relations with Egypt (which are very important to Hamas) and of causing ripples in the internal Palestinian reconciliation process.

Appendix A

Statements about Iranian military support for the Palestinian terrorist organizations

Statements by senior Hamas figures

- ▶ Since Yahya al-Sinwar was elected to head Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip he has often spoken of the close relations between Hamas and Iran, **expressly mentioning Qassem Soleimani and the Qods Force**. Al-Sinwar said that in a conversation he had with Qassem Soleimani on December 11, 2017, regarding Trump's declaration about Jerusalem, **Soleimani said he was willing to provide Hamas with all the resources necessary for the struggle for Jerusalem**. He claimed Soleimani had told him that the **IRGC and the Qods Force stood side by side with the Palestinian people** (Fars, December 25, 2017).
- ▶ **Additional statements by Yahya al-Sinwar in recent months were the following:**
 - ◆ Meeting with young Palestinians on December 21, 2017, al-Sinwar repeated that **Qassem Soleimani was in contact with Hamas' military wing**. He also said the Iranians had not imposed any conditions on the "resistance" [i.e., conditions for receiving military support] (Filastin al-Yawm, and Safa, December 21, 2017)
 - ◆ In a closed meeting Yahya al-Sinwar held in his office with a group of political columnists and commentators, **he thanked Iran for its unending support of the "resistance,"** and called on all countries to support it the way Iran did (Facebook page of Husam al-Dajani, August 16, 2017).
- ▶ Other statements from senior Hamas figures on the subject have been the following:
 - ◆ **Saleh al-Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau,** said Hamas' political ties with Iran had been harmed by the outbreak of the Arab Spring, **but even when the disagreements were at their worst, Iran did not stop supplying Hamas with military support**. He said that despite the severing of ties, **Iran continued to be the key provider of military support for the "resistance."** According to al-Arouri, Hamas' ties with Iran are based on the fact that it is the only country saying Israel is "a cancerous entity" that has to be removed from the region, and it is the only country providing genuine and public support for the "Palestinian resistance." **He added that he was referring to military support, stressing that it was not "nominal" but rather genuine, key support vital to the existence of the "resistance" and its**

continued operation (al-Aqsa YouTube channel and Hamas movement website, December 30, 2017, Sama, December 31, 2017).



Saleh al-Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, interviewed by al-Quds TV (al-Quds satellite TV channel on YouTube, December 30, 2017).

- ◆ During a visit to Iran **Saleh al-Arouri said Iran was the main support of Hamas' military wing** and that its support was present in every field. He said that the main and central supporter of Hamas' military wing in developing its capabilities was Iran, whether at the level of expert guidance or direct support. He added that Hamas hoped the support would continue until "the occupation is stamped out" (al-Alam TV, October 22, 2017).
- ◆ **Khaled al-Qadoumi, Hamas representative in Iran**, said that at the end of 2016 a new leaf had been turned over in relations between Hamas and Iran, and that **in the six previous months relations had entered a new stage**. The relations, he claimed, were based on strong, stable principles. He said Iranian support for the "resistance" had never stopped, even though, he admitted, there had been times when it had lessened. Iran and Hamas, he said, had a common enemy and cooperated in their struggle against it. He added that Iran-Hamas relations were now taking the correct path, and that both sides agreed to focus on expanding mutual cooperation (ISNA, June 21, 2017).

Statement by a PIJ spokesman

- ▶ In a telephone interview, **PIJ spokesman Da'ud Shehab** said Iran's support for the Palestinian people and the "Palestinian resistance" had been **clear, especially recently**. He said that **Qassem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, kept in contact with the leadership of both Hamas and the PIJ's military wings**. He said Soleimani had told

him that **Iran was prepared to take any and all measures for the sake of the intifada and to defend the Palestinian territories and Jerusalem.**

Statement by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah

- ▶ **Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah** said he had met with representatives of Hamas, Fatah and other organizations (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and al-Saiqa). He said they all agreed on the importance of Jerusalem and the need for demonstrations and **to exert pressure.** Nasrallah admitted that to that end Hezbollah provided political, financial and media support.
- ▶ **Iran, as well,** Nasrallah said, **helped,** as it had helped during the Jerusalem intifada by providing funds for the wounded and for families whose houses had been destroyed. According to Nasrallah, **Iran supported all the "Palestinian resistance" organizations,** and that was why the United States had imposed sanctions on it. He added that **the "resistance" in Palestine needed weapons and military capabilities,** Iran's support for the "resistance" was permanent and did not depend on various decisions (al-Mayadeen, January 3, 2018).



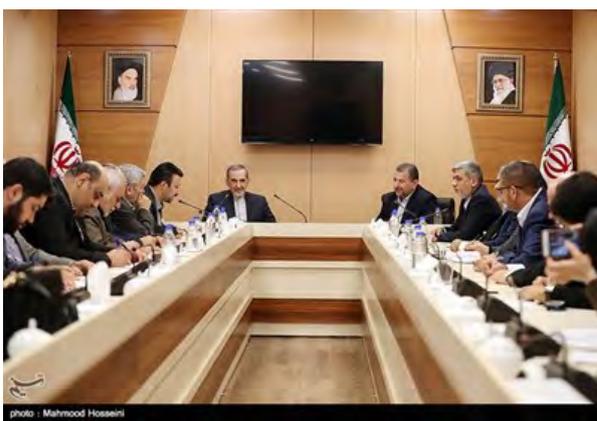
Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah interviewed by the Lebanese TV station al-Mayadeen (al-Mayadeen YouTube channel, January 3, 2018).

Appendix B

Visits of Hamas delegations and meetings with senior Iranian figures

In addition to making statements, in recent months senior Hamas figures have held meetings with the Iranian leadership. The meetings took place **in Iran and Lebanon**, and were attended mainly by "external" Hamas operatives. Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, is also expected to visit Iran.

- ▶ The following were some of the visits held recently:
 - ◆ **On October 20, 2017, a senior Hamas delegation visited Tehran.** It was headed by Saleh al-Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau. Other participants were Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri and Khaled al-Qadoumi, Hamas representative in Iran (Hamas website, October 20, 2017). During the visit they met with Ali Larijani, Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, and Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security. The senior Hamas figures gave in series of interviews in which they praised Iranian support for Hamas. They said the objective of the visit was to strengthen ties with Iran, but claimed the ties were not at the expense of the internal Palestinian reconciliation.



Right: Cartoon of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's anger over the visit of the Hamas delegation to Tehran (alresala.net, October 23, 2017). Left: The Hamas delegation meets with Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs (Tasnim, October 21, 2017).

- ◆ On November 1, 2017, a Hamas delegation led by Saleh al-Arouri arrived in Tehran to participate in a memorial service for Qassem Soleimani's father. Before the visit Saleh al-Arouri met in Lebanon with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah (Felesteen, November 1, 2017).



Condolence telegram in Persian sent by Isma'il Haniyeh to Qassem Soleimani (Naba' Press, November 3, 2017).

- ◆ In August 2017 a delegation of senior Hamas figures participated in the swearing in of Hassan Rouhani as president of Iran, after having received a formal invitation to attend. The invitation was given during a meeting of a delegation of senior Hamas figures in Lebanon headed by Saleh al-Arouri with Amir Abdollahian, special advisor on international affairs to the speaker of the Iranian Parliament, and Mohammad FathAli, the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon (Hamas website, August 2, 2017). Hamas' political bureau said in an announcement issued before the delegation left for Iran, that by sending a high-ranking delegation, **Hamas was expressing its thanks to Iran for supporting the Palestinian struggle and the "Palestinian resistance."** Hamas also stressed the importance it accorded to strengthening relations with Iran (Hamas website, August 7, 2017).



Right: Members of the delegation meet with Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister. Left: Members of the delegation meet with the speaker of the Majlis (Hamas website, August 7, 2017).