

Support or Hostility: the Relationship between Arab Countries and Hamas*

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***Abstract:** Many Arab countries maintain some kind of relations with Hamas, offering financial, moral, or rhetorical support to it, out of consideration of protection and promotion over Arabic national interests. Their support has become important exogenous aid that Hamas could resort to. Among all the Arab countries, Jordan and Syria draw special attention from the outside world for their especially intimate relations with Hamas. However, many Arab countries do not like Hamas, or even have some hostilities to it. There are three reasons that can explain such a paradox: 1) They are afraid that Hamas might stir up Islamic extremism inside their own countries; 2) The extremist attitudes of Hamas have become a tremendous barrier obstructing the permanent resolution to the Israel-Arab problem; 3) They are worrying about the strengthening of Iran. In the final analysis, no matter whether giving support or having hostility towards Hamas, Arab countries formulate their policies on the basis of an overall evaluation and contemplation over their own national interests.*

***Key Words:** Arab Countries; Hamas; Palestine; Middle East Peace Process*

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I. Contacts between Arab countries and Hamas

1. Support Offered by Arab Countries to Hamas

The emergence of Hamas is a reflection of the rise of Palestine Islamic Revival Movement. Since its establishment, Hamas has been calling for support from the Arab world, Islamic countries, and Islamic organizations. The Charter of Hamas makes a very explicit declaration: "Arab countries surrounding Israel should open their borders for the Mujahideen of Arab and all the Islamic peoples, so that they may play a role in the affairs of their brothers—the Palestinian Islamic Brotherhood. We also ask other Arab and Islamic countries for provision of equipments, which is their duty for the Islamic world." (Ziad, 1994: 83). The Islamic organizations and related personnel of such countries as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries, Sudan, Algeria, and Tunisia, offered their enthusiastic assistance to Hamas (Ziad, 1993: Summer, 16). Dr. Hilmi Muhammad Qa'ud, a famous Islamic writer of Egypt, once gave a very favorable remark on the rise of the Hamas movement: "Perhaps the most important event in this century is the rise of Islamic Resistance Movement in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the heart of Jerusalem and Palestine. Hamas could act as a pioneer and vanguard for all the Islamic countries." He also claimed that "Hamas appeared timely as Allah wishes, so it will be protected by Allah while confronting all of its enemies, and will be blessed by Allah for final victory." (Ziad, 1994: 62). Private donations from Islamic organizations of Arab countries, especially of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf countries, and Sudan, have become one of the most important financial sources of Hamas (Ziad, 1993: Summer, 17).

It is revealed by some materials that such Gulf countries as Saudi Arabia also support Hamas. As early as the time before the Gulf Crisis in 1990, Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf countries had already offered some financial support to Hamas (Ziad, 1993: Summer, 17). During the Gulf Crisis, Hamas opposed Iraqi

aggression into Kuwait. Meanwhile it also vehemently opposed any major foreign military intervention into the Gulf region, announcing that an "US attack on Bagdad will immediately lead to an attack on Tel Aviv." (Ziad, 1994: 132). Such a position of Hamas posed a negative impact on its relationship with Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, as well as its relations with Islamic organizations inside these Gulf countries, but at the same time brought support related to its relationship with Iran (Ziad, 1993: Summer, 16). However, after the Gulf War in 1991, Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf countries restored their relations with Hamas for the purpose of punishing the Palestine Liberation Organization because of its support to Iraq in the Gulf War of 1991 (Ziad, 1994: 88).

From February 19 to 24 of 1998, Ahmad Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, visited Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arabic Emirates, and Yemen, where he was enthusiastically greeted by local people (Kristianasen, 1999: Spring, 31). In September 1999, some Hamas leaders, led by Khalid Masha'al, the director of the Politics Section of Hamas, were expelled by Jordan. In their dilemma, Qatar extended assistance to them. On November the 21st of that year, Khalid Masha'al and his comrades came to Qatar, because Emir Hamad Ben Khalifa al-Thani of Qatar proposed to accept them. It was explained that Qatar chose to accept them because "Qatar could maintain friendly relations with Jordan, US, and Israel at the same time." "Are you willing to expel them to Iran where it will be very difficult to control their activities, or are you willing to send them to Syria, which is yet to be regarded as a friendly country by US and Israel?" (Kumaraswamy, 2003: 121). Nevertheless, it deserves special attention that Saudi Arabia and some other countries strongly deny their support to Hamas on some public occasions. For example, during an interview with CNN correspondent, Turki al-Faisal, the Saudi ambassador in the US, pointed out that "we extend our support to Palestinian National

Authority through the channel of UN and League of Arab States, so any private donation to Hamas should be regarded as a personal deed." He said that the "Saudi Arabian government always supports Palestinian people through Palestinian National Authority, not other native organizations."

Some Arab countries also approved the establishment of Hamas branch offices on their own territories. Hamas has established branch offices in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon (the office in Jordan was closed in 1999), so leaders of Hamas frequently visited Cairo, Khartoum, and Doha. Even many commoners of the Arabic world support Hamas.

Arab countries have all expressed their vehement condemnation over the Israeli targeted liquidation over leaders of Hamas. From March 22 to April 17 of 2004, Ahmad Yassin and Abd al-'Aziz Rantisi, two of the top leaders of Hamas, were killed by Israel in its actions of targeted liquidation. Then large-scale demonstrations by common people against Israeli violent killing broke out in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, and Iraq. Various Arab countries also condemned Israel for its atrocity. Ahmed Maher El Sayed, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, claimed that the Israeli policy of assassination and torture against the Palestinian people will make violence escalate relentlessly in a vicious cycle, totally destroying any possibility of peace and menacing the peace and security of the whole world by pushing the Middle East into an abyss of turmoil. The Jordanian government also announced that the Israeli assassination of Ahmad Yassin, which was followed by its repetitive attacks on leaders of Hamas, would only get Israel-Palestine conflicts escalating endlessly, again evidencing that Israel was the culprit that leads to all the violent turmoil of Middle East region. The foreign ministries of such countries as Qatar, Morocco, Lebanon, and Yemen all condemned or denounced the savage and brutal atrocities of Israel, which were regarded as terrorist actions and for which they thought US should also be responsible (Ma, 2004: April 19). In addition, the Council of the League of Arab States rallied a special meeting of

permanent delegates, strongly denouncing Israeli atrocity and presenting their condolence to widows of relatives of Yassin's family.

From December 2008 to January 2009, large-scale armed conflicts broke out in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Hamas. Arab people were infuriated at the Israeli militancy and organized momentous marches and demonstrations in support of righteous struggles of Palestinian people against Israeli aggressive actions. However, in comparison to the passionate support of common people in the Arabic world, the stands of various Arab countries were somewhat different from one another. Syria and Qatar explicitly declared their support for Hamas. Syria even cut off its indirect contact with Israel. On the First Session of the Arab Summit for Economy, Development, and Social Affairs held during January 19 to 20, 2009 in Kuwait City, the Capital of Kuwait, Bashar al-Assad, the President of Syria, called for Arab countries to list Israel as a "terrorist country" and to support the Palestinian resistance movement.

Qatar also invited Hamas leader Masha'al to attend the Arab Leaders' Summit held in Doha. Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabor Al-Thani, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar pointed out that "Hamas is an important player in the Gaza crisis, so its leader Masha'al should be invited to attend the Arabic Leaders' Summit. I invited him to take part in the Foreign Minister's Meeting of the League of Arab States together with Palestinian Foreign Minister, so as to send a message to Israel that Hamas is our brother and we support them." In addition, Mauritania called back its ambassador from Israel; Qatar and Mauritania froze their diplomatic relations with Israel. At the same time, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan argued that Hamas should also be regarded as partially responsible for the warfare, when they denounced Israeli aggression and called for a ceasefire.

2. Relations between Jordan, Syria, and Hamas

Among all the Arab countries, Syria and Jordan draw most attention from the world for their relations with Hamas. Upon its establishment, Hamas received extensive moral, political,

material, and religious doctrinal support from the Muslim Brotherhood of Jordan (Ziad, 1993: Summer,16). As major founding backbone of Hamas, Some members of Muslim Brotherhood secured several important positions in the initial institution of its leadership (Ziad, 1994: 129). Hamam Said, the leader of the Jordan Muslim Brotherhood who had been newly elected in 2008, publicly offered his favor to Hamas (Sai & Meng, 2009: 34). The Jordanian government has also been suspected by the outside world as a supporter of Hamas. In the summer of 1988, members of the Muslim Brotherhood were suddenly accepted as editors of Jordanian newspapers, and some high-ranking officers of Hamas were even invited to visit offices of Jordan's General Intelligence Bureau and some other governmental agencies in Amman (Ze'ev & Ya'ari, 1989: 234). At the end of 1992, Hamas set up its intelligence office and political bureau in Amman. Imad Alami and Musa Abu Marzuq (who is now the vice chairman of its political bureau and vice director of its political section), the two famous military leaders of Hamas, were granted right of permanent residence by Jordan (Kristianasen, 21).

In 1997, due to efforts of Jordan, Masha'al and Yassin were rescued and released from prison. This is a milestone in the relations between Jordan and Hamas. On September 25 of that year, two agents of Mossad were arrested by Jordanian police when they were just going to slay Masha'al, who was already the director of the political section of Hamas. Jordan's king Hussein proposed two options to Israel: 1) If Masha'al was slain by Israel, Jordan would reveal the identities of the two arrested agents, who might be convicted and hanged publicly; 2) Israel would admit its crime, apologize for it, and at the same time provide necessary medical equipments and antidote for the remedy of Masha'al (Kumaraswamy, 114). After careful consideration, Israel had no choice but to accept the latter option. Hussein also demanded that the Hamas spiritual leader Yassin be released from an Israeli jail in exchange for the release of arrested

Israeli agents. Under Jordan's pressure, Israel released Yassin on October 1 of that year, who had been imprisoned for as long as ten years. Yassin was greeted in Amman, and then he returned to Gaza. But Hamas denied any trade-off between Yassin's release and the release of the two arrested Israeli agents (Kumaraswamy,116). Jordan's action in this case shows the unusual relationship between Jordan and Hamas. In May of that same year, Marzook, a high-ranking member of the Hamas political bureau, was also accepted by Jordan after he had been jailed in the US for 2 years.

However, in September of 1999, Jordan openly expelled the Hamas leadership headed by Masha'al, underscoring that Masha'al and his Hamas comrades "participated into non-Jordan organization and owned light weapons". Furthermore, Jordan also closed the Hamas branch office in Amman and forbade any Hamas activities on the territory of Jordan, which is regarded as a sudden turnover in the relations between Jordan and Hamas. In September 2003, the Central Bank of Jordan issued a decree to freeze Yassin and Masha'al's accounts in Jordanian banks. In 2006, Jordanian authorities charged Hamas members of smuggling weapons from Syria to Jordan. The bilateral relation more and more deteriorated.

Amid the worsening relations between Jordan and Hamas, its relation with Syria became more and more outstanding. The Damascus branch office of Hamas had been established in a common apartment building in a Palestinian refugee camp located in the southeast part of that city. Since November 1999, Masha'al and other Hamas leaders began to settle down in Damascus after they had been expelled by Jordan and transferred to Qatar. So Damascus since then has become a major headquarters for Hamas outside Palestine. For the past years, Syria resisted pressure from the US and other Western countries and endeavored to defend Hamas activities in Damascus. Syria called for a differentiation between international terrorism and righteous struggle for national liberation from foreign occupation on many different international occasions, emphasizing that the branch offices of various factions of Palestinian organizations were engaged

in press affairs and political activities, without any involvement in armed or terrorist actions (Wu, 2005: November 7). On some formal and official occasions, the headquarters of Hamas and other Palestinian organizations were called “public relation companies” by Syria. In May 2004, Syria defeated an attempted assassination on Masha’al by Israeli agents. At the end of August 2008, Syria asked Masha’al to exile himself to Sudan, but he returned to Damascus soon. Currently Damascus is still the major center of activities of Hamas leadership.

3. Support Offered to Hamas Government by Arab Countries

At the end of 2006, Hamas won the general election of Palestine. The US and Israel decided to pose a policy of blockade towards the Hamas government because it denied disarmament, halt of violent actions, and renunciation of annihilating Israel, which were three requirements raised by the US and Israel. The US even demanded that all the Arab countries should not support Hamas. However, the Arab countries differed from one another on this issue. During February to March 2006, many Arab countries declared their support to Hamas government one by one. For example, when Egyptian President Mubarak and its Foreign Minister Abul Gheit explained the Egyptian stand on this issue to US State Secretary Condoliza Rice, they emphasized that the US must give more time to Hamas so that it could evaluate the actual situation and clarify its own attitude, and that US should not be too much prejudiced against Hamas or cut off aid to the new government led by Hamas.

On February 23, 2007, Saud Al-Faisal also told Rice that Saudi Arabia not only supported the Middle East peace process, but also respected the choice made by the Palestinian people, so Saudi Arabia did not agree with any punitive measures right after the Palestinian election and planned to continue its monthly aid of 15 million US dollars to Palestine. On March 5, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said that the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian general election was

the Palestinian voters' choice on resistance route. On March 20, Yemen President Ali Abdullah Saleh emphasized that Hamas was not a terrorist organization, but an organization fighting for a termination of Israeli occupation on Palestinian territory and for an independent state of Palestinian people, so the international community should respect the Palestinian people's choice by their voting. He argued that the Arab states and international community should support the new government of Palestine (An, 2006: 5). At the end of March of that year, on the 18th summit of the League of Arab States held in Khartoum, all the Arab leaders who participated in that summit called for international respect for the Palestinian people's will and avoiding any boycott on the final outcome of Palestinian parliament election. Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika pointed out at this summit that any boycott on the outcome of the recent Palestinian parliament election meant hostility and punishment over all the Palestinian people. Sudan President al-Bashir, who was the chairman of this summit, raised a proposal of "Three Nos" (Ma, 2006: March 31) ,which meant "no" to any denial on the democratic choice made by Palestinian people, "no" to any punishment imposed on Palestinians, and "no" to the Israeli deliberate intent to violate agreements already signed by it. Meanwhile the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) headquartered in Saudi Arabia, as well as Iran, Turkey, and Russia, all expressed their support to Hamas.

Due to the blockade imposed by US and Israel, Hamas government fell into financial crisis after its victory of election, and asked Arab countries for help. Its demand was met by generous assistance from some Arab countries. For example, Qatar agreed to offer 50 million US dollars, Saudi Arabia promised to provide 90 million US dollars, and the Arab Monetary Fund was also committed to offering 50 million US dollars. Meanwhile Iran promised to offer 50 million US dollars. Besides, it was revealed by Palestinian Finance Minister that the League of Arab States established a bank account in Egypt, through which it raised 70 million US dollars (not including the financial aid promised by Saudi Arabia). On April 26 of that year, the

League of Arab States declared that it had transferred 50 million US dollars to Palestine. On March 30 of that year, Syria even sponsored a one-week nationwide movement of fundraising for Palestine. The timely financial aid from Arab countries eased the urgent need of Hamas government to some degree.

In addition, Arab countries took enormous endeavors to mediate between Hamas and Al Fatah, managing to reconcile their relations. In January 2007, Hamas and Al Fatah finally reached the Mecca Agreement under the mediation of Saudi Arabia. They both agreed to establish a united government. But not long after the signing of that agreement, the Palestine national unity government collapsed in June 2007, and Hamas controlled the Gaza Strip by force. After the collapse, many Arab countries, including Egypt and Jordan, refused to recognize Hamas activities in Gaza Strip. Then Hamas held a multi-round national reconciliation dialogue with Al Fatah and other Palestinian factions in Cairo, thanks to the mediation by Egypt. However, this dialogue has yet to achieve any substantial progress due to huge gap between both parties on some issues.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that Arab countries generally maintain some kind of relations or connections with Hamas, providing it with moral, financial or rhetorical support, which become very important exogenous aid that Hamas could resort to. However, the degrees of involvements vary from one Arab country to another.

II. Actual Support or Hostility? The Essence Hidden behind Relations between Arab countries and Hamas

The cause of Palestine fit the common interest of the whole Arab people. So both common people and governments of Arab countries chose to support Palestine without exception when the Palestinian people fight against Israel by sacrificing their blood and lives, out of their sense of brotherhood with the Palestinian people. Although strongly pressed by the US and other Western countries, governments of various Arab countries could not deny the righteousness and

legitimacy of Hamas' armed struggle against Israel, and maintained some kind of relations or connections with it. It is because of such circumstances that Hamas could win much sympathy and support from many Arab countries.

However, Arab support to Hamas is mainly confined to moral and rhetorical ones, owing to some embarrassing considerations that could not be made explicit. For example, superficially Arab countries admitted the status quo of Hamas' victory in the general election, and called for more time to be given to Hamas for its adjustment on its policies, but deeply some Arab countries do not recognize or accept Hamas. Some experts make an analysis on the complicated psychology of Arab people and Arab countries in this way: Most common people of the Arab world admire the attitude of open defiance of Hamas and hail its victory of Palestinian election, because they respect the Islamic identity and awareness of Hamas against the macro background of religious recurrence in the Islamic world, and some people even regard its victory as a warning to Palestine Liberation Organization, whereas the feeling of local rulers of that region towards Hamas has already turned into hostility from just detestation. Egypt and Jordan hope to maintain tranquility and fear any possible sign of encouragement to their domestic Islamic opposition. That is why Jordan expelled high-ranking leaders of Hamas several years ago.

Just recently, Jordan police arrested a group of Hamas arms dealers, and then Hamas foreign minister's visit to Amman was eliminated. Although it accepted Hamas' ambassador, Egypt agrees with such an opinion in private: it is right to put Hamas aside before it recognizes Israel and respects those agreements signed before. Those rich countries in the Gulf region feel much less threat from Hamas, but they also get bored with any doctrines. Owing to the royal attitude towards Islamism, Saudi Arabia has always played the role of major sponsor to Palestine. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia would rather choose Wahhabist as their target of support, instead of Hamas. Meanwhile they dislike Hamas' close contact with Iran, which is a rival against

Saudi Arabia in the contest for leadership in Islamic world. A minister of a Gulf country once said that 'humanitarianism is of course a reason that we give aid, but an Arab consensus towards peaceful resolution to the Palestine issue is also a very important point that we hold. We would love Hamas if it accepts this point.' As the country in which some Hamas leaders established their residence, Syria also has a feeling of mixture of both love and abomination towards Hamas. Syrian support to Hamas could be fully justified by the cause of Palestinian people, but could also indirectly enhance Syrian domestic strength of Muslim Brotherhood. Chinese researcher Yin Gang argues that due to fear of the strengthening of Hamas from the bottom of its heart, "any Arab country will not truly support Hamas, because such support will undoubtedly set up an example for its own domestic strength of Islamic extremism. As a matter of fact, Arab countries dislike Hamas. But they feel pleased to see Hamas bringing troubles to Israel. However, it is Arab countries, not Israel, who truly fear the substantial strengthening of Hamas." (Yin, 2009: January 4).

When Hamas controlled the Gaza Strip, many Arab countries appeared indifferent or detached from the damage and suffering that Hamas endured after it was attacked. The Israeli blockade brought much misery to the Gaza Strip, but Egypt frequently closed the only outlet of the Gaza Strip: the Port of Rafah. The situation of the Gaza Strip was trapped into an urgent crisis after the breakout of the Israel-Palestine conflict, but Egypt insisted on the 2005 tri-lateral agreement signed by Palestine, Israel, and EU, and even refused to open the Port of Rafah, justifying its attitude in the excuse of the absence of Abbas' troop and the retreat of EU inspector. Some media even revealed that the mistake of Egyptian intelligence caused severe loss of Hamas: "Egypt had assured Hamas with full confidence that Israel would not launch attack on the Saturday because it is a Sabbath Day. Due to Egyptian assurance Hamas staff members stepped out of safe bunkers and even organized graduation ceremony for its military students on the drill ground outside its headquarters. In fact, this place is the spot on which Hamas suffered the most severe loss."

A Hamas officer testified this opinion: "Several hours before the attack, Egypt made an assurance to our delegates that Israel will not launch attack on Saturday. Now we believe that Egyptians cheated us deliberately so as to offer Israel some convenience for its attack." When the Israeli attack happened, Arab governments did not take much substantial rescue or aid actions despite strong indignation of common Arab people. Hamad Bin Jassim, the Qatar Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, openly said: "Israeli aggression into Gaza Strip has been operated for 16 days, and some Arab countries hope to see a defeated Hamas. On December 31, 2008, some country even proposed to instigate Israel to bomb Hamas for two to three days as a punishment and then let Palestinian National Authority to return to Gaza Strip. Some other countries regard Hamas as a burdensome trouble-maker that deserves defeats." Some media even doubted that the conflict in Gaza Strip was a conspiracy plotted by Arab countries: "By means of its military actions into Gaza Strip, Israel intends to create bloody strife, escalate the tension, and incite international intervention, so that Palestine might be forced to sign a regional or even international agreement that makes Gaza Strip annexed to Egypt, which could guarantee the security of Israel, and makes West Bank annexed to Jordan, which could be further regarded as an alternative motherland by Palestinians. So some people doubt that conflict in Gaza Strip is a conspiracy plotted by Israel and a few Arab countries (Gu, 2009: February 4).

Although promising to offer financial aid to Hamas government, Arab countries often break their promise and refrain from taking substantial measures. Samir Gata, who is in charge of the Kuzz Research Center of Palestine, said that: "Since the Beirut Summit of League of Arab States in 2002, governments of Arab countries have determined to offer an annual aid of 600 million US dollars to the Palestinian people. However, this promise has never been fulfilled. Arab countries have not granted money to Arafat (the late chairman of Palestinian National Authority), so why should they offer aid to Hamas?" (Shi, 2006: February 21). A high-ranking official of Palestine

also pointed out that: "Out of the 600 million US dollars of aid that Arab countries promised to give Palestinian people, they have only paid 100 million at the most." (Shi, 2006: February 21).

Many Arab countries do not actually support Hamas mainly for three reasons: First, they fear that Hamas' development might stir up their domestic Islamic extremist strength. The regimes of Arab countries are universally confronted with challenges from extremist Islamic force, so their governments are quite alert on the influence of Hamas. Just as Robert Lowe, a researcher of the famous London think tank Chatham House, once said: "The key issue is the Islamist ideology of Hamas, whose success bring much trouble to some Arab countries. Hamas climbed onto the throne of political power through its victory in the 2006 general election of Palestine, which has been regarded as one of the fairest and most liberal elections in the Arab history. Such a paradox brings much trouble to the Arab world. So many people doubt that Arab countries are pleased to see a cracked and defeated Hamas. However, they are also faced with a thorny problem: how to deal with public opinion and how to get harmonized with public mood."

Some articles even regarded Arab countries' reluctance to support to Hamas as a conflict between Arabic nationalism and Islamism: Welcome to new Middle East, which is no longer featured by Arab-Israel conflict, but characterized by conflict between Arab nationalism and Islamism. Such reality should be realized: almost all the Arab countries (except Syria, an ally of Iran) and even Palestinian authorities hope that Hamas could be defeated in Gaza Strip. Because they share a common interest of frustrating Islamic revolutionary groups, especially those groups in alliance with Iran, they are on longer concerned with 'Arab Street', and appear more tranquil than they were in previous conflicts (such as Kuwait War in 1991, Palestinian resurrections from 2000 to 2004, and Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006). Current Middle East is quite different from the past Middle East on many important aspects. The domestic politics of almost every Arab country is focused on the conflict between Arab nationalist

authorities and Islamist oppositions. That is to say, Hamas is the natural ally of the enemies of these Arabic regimes. An Islamist state in Gaza Strip is a great encouragement to people in pursuit of similar entities in Egypt, Jordan, and other Arab countries (Rubin, 2009: January 19).

Second, the extremist attitude of Hamas has become the major obstruction to the permanent settlement of Israel-Palestine issue. The ever-lasting confrontation and conflicts between Arab and Israel have made Arab countries suffer a lot. Currently the approach of a coexistence of both the Israeli state and Palestinian state has become an international consensus for the resolution of the Palestine problem. Among various Arab countries, Jordan, Egypt and Syria have established peace with Israel, and some other Arab countries have also accepted the approach of coexistence. However, Hamas persists in its denial to recognize the Israel state, stimulating dissatisfaction of those Arab countries who hope to see the coexistence of Israel and Palestine. A US newspaper analyzes this issue in this way: Once Israel refuses to burden the task of humanitarianism rescue and aid in Gaza Strip, it would be quite probable that Egypt and Jordan are to be pressed by the international community to accept Palestinian refugees living along their border at the present. Both countries would hate to see such situation. Egyptian and Jordan officials always feel more deeply concerned when they see television images of casualties in Gaza, because they do not want to see the most fundamental principle of Middle East peace process, which are advocated and promoted by them, deviated from established track, and that principle is the approach of a coexistence of both Palestinian state and Israeli state in peace and security.

Third, they also worry about the increase of Iranian power. Iran is a major supporter of Hamas. From the perspective of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, it endeavors to turn itself into the leading force of Middle East by dealing strikes on its rivals and enemies through the proxy role of Hamas. They are very disturbed at such a situation. Tariq Alhomayed, the Saudi Arabian editor-in-chief of the newspaper

al-Sharqal-Awsat, calls Hamas a tool of Iran, and regards Iran as “the real menace to the security of Arab world” (Rubin, 2009: January 19). Because of such a consideration, many Arab countries do not give any substantial support to Hamas so as to obstruct the expansion of Iranian influence. Some article analyzes it in this way: “Arab countries are confronting an Iran-Syria alliance that includes Hamas and Hezbollah, so there are regional conflicts between these two blocs in addition to internal or domestic conflicts. One aspect of such conflict can be positioned is the challenges brought by rivals led by Shiite Muslims against countries led by Sunni Muslims for regional hegemony. Any help to Hamas will strengthen the ambition of radical Islamism and Iran, and at the same time weaken the strengths of not only Israel, but also Palestinian Authority and other countries. Therefore Arab countries are reluctant to help their worst enemy.” (Rubin, 2009: January 19).

Actually, the fundamental cause that drives Arab countries to refrain from supporting Hamas, or even to become hostile to it, is the delicate consideration and weighing of their interest. The Palestine problem is a card that various Arab countries want to play, and their attitudes towards it depend on their differentiated interests. Egypt has determined to alienate itself from Arab-Israel war ever since Sadat promised that the October War was the last war between Egypt and Israel. Since then Egypt never gets involved into any conflict between the Arabs and Israel. Therefore it is not possible that Egypt might get involved in any conflict between Hamas and Israel, because support to Hamas does not fit for its national interest, and not beneficial to its domestic stability. Some scholar analyzed this issue in this way: “It is reasonable and understandable that Egypt and its Arab allies choose to isolate Hamas. They began to adopt such policy since the victory of Hamas over the general election in 2006, under the pressure from the US. Egypt closes its border partly due to its intent to please US, which will offer aid to Mubarak, partly due to Mubarak government’s abomination towards Hamas, a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and partly due to their consideration of forcing Hamas to abduct its

power to a fully legitimate Palestinian National Authority so as to keep a unity of Palestine and continue peace with Israel. Besides, Egypt insists that Israel must take full responsibility of Gaza because it worries about the sudden collapse of Gaza and the subsequent dilemma brought to Egypt, which could be regarded as a long-term objective of Israel. " However, despite of its reluctance to support to Hamas, Egypt still keeps a close contact with Hamas and mediates between Hamas, Israel, and various factions of Palestine, showing its unique influence over Middle East affairs.

Jordan once supported Hamas, for the purpose of appeasing its domestic Muslim Brotherhood, which is a legal entity on its territory, strengthening its royal ruling, and checking the Palestine Liberation Organization. However, when Hamas activities menaced its own national interest, it immediately changed its stand. Its expelling of Hamas leaders in 1999 is an example. At that time, Jordan expelled Hamas leaders in the excuse that they participated in non-Jordanian organizations. Actually, there were two reasons hidden behind its expulsion: 1) Jordan still admitted Palestine Liberation Organization as the sole legal representative and Palestinian National Authority as the only legal regime of Palestine, while Hamas strongly opposed Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian National Authority. So Jordan support to Hamas would run counter to its policy of official recognition of PLO and Palestinian National Authority. Jordan king Abdullah II pointed out that: "Hamas reaches too far, and this issue is now related to problem of crime." (Kumaraswamy, 121). Rawabda, Jordan's Prime Minister at that time, declared that: "Anyone who wants to organize opposition against another Arab country on Jordan's territory should go to that country and organize their strength there." (Kumaraswamy, 121). Another Arabic official who declined to reveal his name also pointed out: "Hamas will no longer exist on Jordan's territory. The past is over and will not be recovered. Jordan hopes Hamas to support Palestinian National Authority

in the negotiation on the final status of that region. On this crucial stage of negotiation, Jordan will not harbor any organization that sabotages Palestinian National Authority.” (Kumaraswamy, 121). 2) Jordan finally established peace with Israel and normalized its diplomatic relation with it, but Hamas continues its stand of anti-Israel and anti-peace talk, which has already threatened national interest of Israel. A high-ranking official of Jordan said: “Our king does not want Hamas leaders to stay in Jordan. If Hamas launches a new round of bombing attack, our king wants Israelis to focus their eyes on Gaza, not Jordan.” (Beyer & Hamad, 1998: June 22). Hamas also knows Jordan’s calculation on this issue and regards its expelling as a long-term plot. Masha’al refuted Jordan justification by saying: “Hamas’ existence is not a burden to either this country or any of its parties. Our work is limited to politics and press, without any interference on Jordan’s internal affairs or any infringement on its security. We view the security of Jordan and Arab World as our own security. So our existence is not a burden to anyone, but an asset to the whole Arabic and Islamic world. Our relation with Jordan is not maintained at the expense of anyone else, especially the Palestinian National Authority (Kumaraswamy, 123).

Syrian support to Hamas is based on the consideration of its own national interest, just as is Egyptian and Jordanian refraining from support. Syrian has a psychological complex of a “Grand Syria Plan”, which includes Palestine. Therefore Syria is very enthusiastic on the cause of Palestine. But Syria has not been getting along well with the Palestine Liberation Organization for a long time, so it is determined to check the Palestine Liberation Organization by supporting its opposition. Therefore Hamas as an opposition to PLO has been regarded by Syria as a card that could be played. From this perspective, it is quite understandable that Damascus has become the major foreign location for Hamas to expand its activities overseas. However, pressure from US and other Western countries made Syria to reconsider its relation with Hamas. At the end of August of 2008, in

order to recover its dialogue with Israel and improve its relation with Western countries, Syria reached an agreement with Masha'al that Masha'al would end his exile in Syria and go to Sudan. But Hamas denied that a leak appeared in its relation with Syria. Hamas official Ramadhan said: "The strategic relation between Hamas and Syria is still very firm."

After that agreement, Damascus is still a major spot of gatherings and activities of Hamas leaders, such as Masha'al, but Syria has strengthened its surveillance over Hamas' activities on its territory. For example, the Syrian intelligence agency apparently consolidates its vigil and supervision on Masha'al's residence, observes his visits, interviews, call-ons, and out-goings. Particularly, Syria strictly limits his contacts with other Hamas leaders, requesting the presence of Syrian government representative for his interviews with anyone. In order to prevent Masha'al from communicating outside through a satellite system, Syria orders the dismantlement of the satellite antenna on the top of his residence. He is only allowed to make outward communication by ground cables or electric wires. Such measures are taken by the Syrian government because Hamas seems to try to establish communication channels with the US and EU through Egypt, circumventing Syria. Since his inauguration, US President Obama has started to take some actions to improve US relation with Syria, and hopes that Syria may participate in the Middle East peace process, while Syria also presents its own conditions during US-Syria talk, with an attempt to use its close contact with Hamas as a card to increase its leverage in its talk with the US. In this way, Syria is very exacerbated at Hamas' intent to open its channels of communication with the US and Western world through Egypt by circumventing the Syrian government (An, 2009: July 9).

In brief, out of considerations of universal interest of Arab nation, Arab countries generally offer moral and rhetoric support to Hamas in the name of supporting Palestinians and Islamic cause, and maintain some kind of relation with it. However, as a matter of fact, many Arab countries dislike Hamas from the

bottom of their hearts, and are reluctant to provide any substantial support, with some of them even hostile towards it, due to their calculations of their own national interests. It should be pointed out that Hamas intensifies the division within Palestine and the Arab world, and even weakens the status of Palestine in the peace talk between Palestine and Israel, which has been testified by the recent conflict in Gaza and the evolution of subsequent situation in 2010.

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