

Hamas' Policy Declaration

May 1, 2017, will go down in Palestinian history as an important day. This is because Hamas chose this date to outline its new principles and overall vision for the upcoming period in its "General Principles and Policies Document". The vision outlined by Hamas in this document not only involves some discourse that might be considered new, but also an ordered declaration of some activities that were already in effect. The policy declaration is not only a significant change as it is a written document and announced as a result of a consultation with the public, but it also indicates that a different stage is beginning in terms of the strategy to be followed in the upcoming period.

The important articles of the Declaration can be summarized under the following subtitles:

Pursuant to this declaration, Hamas states that:

- The borders of 1967 will be accepted.

- Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace and therefore Hamas adheres to such principles.

- Palestine is an Arabic territory that cannot be divided.

- Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine.

- The Palestine Liberation Organization is the representative of the Palestinians.

- The Palestinians have the right to return to their own lands.

- The fight is against the Zionist project and not the Jews.

- Hamas is an independent and local organization, though it is based on the idea of Ikhwan.[\[1\]](#)

These declarations by Hamas come in the wake of the increasingly difficult economic and social humanitarian situation in Gaza and the deadlock experienced in the Palestinian state formation process. Recent failure to meet basic needs such as electricity, gas, and clean potable water in Gaza, the brain drain of young intellectuals, small-scale conflicts seen between Palestinians, and highly increased political divisions required these new targets and the need for change. Hamas faced a serious crisis after the war in Syria and flirted between Turkey and Qatar until it became nearly dependent on Qatar's financial support.

Hamas' policy declaration can be interpreted in various ways. Firstly, it is not surprising for Hamas to want to establish a new vision in this new conjuncture that is shaped around politics and security in the Middle East, as well as under the changing conditions. Yet, it has been obvious for a long time that international dynamics and developments would force Hamas into making such a change. The determination of a new strategy has become necessary because it would be much harder to continue this struggle without any support with Donald Trump in power in the USA, the European Union project entering an indefinite stage, and regional powers, namely all the Arabic countries including Egypt, having a different stance specific to the Islamic world. On the other hand, it is also known that the region's states, including Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, have made great efforts to get Hamas to reach a specific line of agreement. In this respect, it is possible to say that Hamas has approached the general line of the Arab world with this new attitude. Therefore, after feeling all the pressure of the Arab world, Hamas' preparation for the new period along with some strategical changes turned out to be an inevitable consequence.

Secondly, Khaled Mashal's statement regarding *separation from the Muslim Brotherhood* must be

correctly interpreted in this context. While this approach is new and interesting as a discourse, it is not something new in terms of the philosophical, intellectual and practical approaches of the Muslim Brotherhood community. Yet it is known that the groups that are close to or affected by the Muslim Brothers in the Islamic world have a level relationship with the Muslim Brothers rather than a directly hierarchical connection and that such relation is not binding. While the groups that are close to the Muslim Brothers adopt the main idea of the brotherhood, they prioritize their local approaches. Therefore, Hamas' emphasis on its Palestinian and Arabic identity is a part of this understanding. The type of relationship that will prevail between the Muslim Brothers and Hamas, and the arrangement for maintaining this will become more clear in the upcoming period. This new situation is also a pragmatic understanding that aims for the mitigation of the embargo implemented on Gaza by Egypt. The simplest way for Gaza to convince Egypt, which is its most important point of exit to the world, is through keeping itself at arm's length from the Ikhwan.

A third remarkable factor is Hamas' statement that it will *fight not with the Jews, but Zionists*. It would not be wrong to interpret this as the formal declaration of a strategy that has already existed in practice. This is because Hamas has not exhibited any approach such as randomly starting a war or being involved in military action for a long time. Hamas' armament for the purpose of resistance and defense since 2008, and practice of targeting Zionists rather than Jews in general in its fight against Israel is a tactic that was already in practice. The declaration of this attitude with a formal document must be interpreted as a step that will increase the international legitimacy of Hamas.

The most significant and radical statement in the Policy Declaration regards the *recognition of Israel as a state with the borders specified in 1967*. This new approach of Hamas that has long been denying the State of Israel and defining its own presence through its anti-Israel attitude reveals that there is a political pressure that it cannot fight against in the new conjuncture. Hamas has been forced by many states in the region, including Qatar, to make negotiations and agreements with Israel on different grounds, even if they are indirect. Beyond Hamas' goal to mitigate all this pressure and embargo, it is also possible to say that the acceptance of the 1967 borders will be one of the most significant ways in which it can ensure it remains a part of the negotiations aimed at resolving the Palestine problem. For the upcoming period, Hamas has declared that it will prioritize the assurance of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, which includes the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem, for the Palestinians, and come up with a different plan for the remaining part of Palestine.

In the context of Palestinian-Israeli relations, rather than Hamas, Israel's approach, security policies and the humanitarian state in the region will be determinant in the new period. Hamas has taken all the steps it could, and in a sense, passed the buck to the global public. Now, with Hamas' change of stance, the states in the region and the global public must increase their pressure on Israel, and take on the responsibility of lifting the embargo placed on Palestine and initializing of the political process.

If Hamas is regarded as a diplomatic player by the international and regional actors, they will have the opportunity to put their statements into practice. The most important deadlock on this point is the possibility of the division between the military wing, and the social service widening. It appears that Hamas will undergo a serious internal change in the upcoming period and might turn into a new movement depending on the divisions and unions that arise.

[1] "Hamas yeni vizyon belgesini açıkladı",

Anadolu Ajansı

, 01.05.2017,

<http://aa.c>