

Abstract

Hamas: A Futuristic Understanding through Israeli and Western Literature

Hamas: A “Futuristic” Understanding through Israeli and Western Literature is the latest English research contribution by the Center of Middle East Studies in Amman. It is the latest of the many books written in Hamas in the west and Israel, which shows the extent of the interest, not just in the Islamic Resistance Movement but also in Gaza and Palestinian politics generally.

Through such literature, the book outlines the early history of Hamas, its roots to the Islamic Brotherhood in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, its creation in 1987, right up to the present. Finally, it provides ‘futuristic’ scenarios, of how the movement is likely to cope, in the face of the persisting Israeli blockade that was first imposed in 2007, and very likely to continue into the immediate, medium and long-term future.

Although, and this might have been unintended, the book shows that through the development of the Islamic movement in Palestine, a “process of creation” was taking place and the Hamas launch, was preceded by decades of “intellectual building” through mosques and other social organizations that stilled awareness among the masses and intellectuals of an “Islamic way” for the liberation of Palestine. This is tackled in the early sections of the book.

The book has been defined into detailed sections starting with the conceptualization of Hamas that initially stressed armed struggle, then moved into the field of political representation, adopting a dual approach to liberation and finally to altering its covenant, declaring its willingness to accept a form of political settlement on the 1967 borders.

Although this is still not washing down too well by Israel which continues to insist Hamas explicitly and categorically recognizes the Jewish state, this book looks at the existing literature with a critical eye. After Hamas won the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Election but were ousted from government, the movement quickly retrenched into Gaza where it formed its own administration to the anger of Israel and which immediately clamped on the Strip, an air, land and sea embargo that continues to bite with no let up.

This was the start of the economic malaise and problems for the Gazan population where they started to live under wars, fears of wars, conflicts and sieges that left them in the depth of poverty which the book highlights through UN statistics and documentation. In the process however, Gaza developed as best as it could under the new masters, Hamas.

The increasing variety of literature mostly written by western scholars, except the Israeli academics who tended to concentrate on the violent nature of the Hamas movement, relations with groups like Hizbollah and Al Qaeda, tended to be more sophisticated in their approach. With the issue of terrorism riding high on the global agenda, these books were not immune, but on the whole, and quite surprisingly, they tended to reflect the siege-situation on the ground siege, spot-lighting the Islamic administration, an effective Hamas government in Gaza together with a Prime Minister and different minister, a bureaucracy and a strong paramilitary police force. Notwithstanding this however, some of the books reviewed looked

at the different government mechanisms that operated, the issue of law and order, and the rise of the so-called “Islamic social sector” to deal with different ills of society brought on by the siege installed by Israel.

Some of the authors of these books were looking at society and polity as they existed first-hand; in other words, most were empirical studies which included on-the-ground interviews with ordinary people and with Hamas officials, personnel of non-governmental organizations as well as activists from different factions that exists in Gaza. As well, the literature reflected the integrated structure of Hamas, its military wing, Izz al-Ddin al-Qassam Brigades, and its political wing composed of an externally-based decision-making Political Bureau and a Shura Council composed of Hamas members in the West Bank and Gaza.

The relationship between these two organizations is also examined didactically to see the degree of “fluidity” between these two organizations. This relationship also covers the “political” to the military structure of the Izz al-Ddin al-Qassam Brigades but in doing so, the book has pointed to a “futuristic” approach especially in the light of the elections of Ismail Haniyeh in 2017 as the new head of the Political Bureau, replacing the long-time chief Khalid Mishaal.

It was these structures that discerned the deteriorating situation in Gaza which the Hamas leaders tried to alleviate in spite of the fact Israel was and continues to consciously punish the population of Gaza, who are perceived as Hamas supporters. Because of this, Israel, as shown by leaked reports and highlighted in this book, attempted to deal with the devastating siege in a callous manner, putting the population on a “subsistence diet” through making sure only the absolute food essentials and medicines enter Gaza and no more with its military officers calculating the daily calories a Palestinian man, women and child absolutely needs daily to barely stay alive.

The financial constraints on Hamas to run a government to serve its people is also highlighted in this book. Throughout the period Hamas finances have been multi-dimensional, relying on different states and even subject to inter-Palestinian relations. After the Arab Spring period of 2011 and 2011, financial support moved from one state to others which was partial still, because the movement would not support the Syrian government in crushing the uprisings taking place in the country. It then begun to follow multiple strategies of alignments based on building relations with many states of radical regimes, conservative ones, and nationalist ones.

Iran was the main financial backer of Hamas, then because of political changes, Qatar became the main backer as the Hamas headquarters changed from Damascus to Doha. Afterwards and following increased revamping of diplomacy, Hamas sought to build relations with different European countries as well different states in Asia like Malaysia and Indonesia.

The book is a didactic one and looks to an “infrastructure of events” that starts with the development of Hamas through a period where it might be fighting for its survival, as emanating from outside external factors and elements beyond its control.