

Hamas' political thought and stances in light of the Arab uprisings

By Khalid Mishaal

This document was originally a paper presented by Mr Khalid Mishaal, the Chief of the Political Bureau of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) at a conference convened by Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, Beirut, on 28-29 November 2012 under the title: "The Islamists in the Arab World and the Palestinian Issue, In Light of the Arab Uprisings,".

After the conference, Mr Mishaal edited and updated the paper and sent it to al-Zaytouna recently for publication. The paper could be considered as an important document of Hamas thought. It explores Hamas' vision for the Palestinian issue, and the practical application of the movement's stances and concepts. Mishaal discusses the "Arab Spring" and its impact on the issue, in addition to Hamas's role and potential challenges. Finally, Mishaal discusses the challenges and problems facing the Arab Spring in its various countries.

The document is as follows:

In the name of Allah Most Merciful Most Beneficent

All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. May Allah send prayers and peace upon our Prophet Muhammad, the Seal of the prophets and messengers, and upon his family, his companions, and all his brothers: the prophets and messengers.

Dear Brothers and Sisters; Ladies and Gentlemen, Assalamu Alaikum wa rahmatullah wa barakatuhu.

I would like to begin by thanking Al-Zaytouna Centre for holding this important conference at this critical time, and I would especially like to thank the General-Manager of the Centre, Dr. Mohsen Saleh. I would also like to greet the attendees and wish them well. Allah willing, this conference will result in important conclusions that will guide the Arab Spring, evolve its position on the Arab-Zionist conflict and produce two advantages; firstly, the advantage of an internal structure based on new foundations of freedom, democracy and combating corruption; and secondly, the advantage of a strong, coherent, and independent foreign policy that maintains its decisions and improves Arab and Islamic performance in relation to Palestine and the general issues of the nation.

The importance of this conference lies in the following:

1. Its timing; it has undoubtedly been held in light of the Arab Spring and the progress of the people's will, their political role and their control over decisions.
2. It is the result of the evolution of the role of Islamists and their rise to power in some Arab countries.
3. It has been held out of consideration for the growing role of the region's resistance movements, especially following the decline in their official role over the past decades, and in light of the growing national role, as well as the significant achievements made by resistance movements.
4. It takes into account the decline of the Zionist project, despite its continued military and technological superiority in the region. This entity is undoubtedly declining and its image in the

world is deteriorating. It has not achieved any victories for a long time, and perhaps what happened during the 8 day Gaza War in which the Palestinian resistance emerged victorious, is a significant indicator of this.

5. The report we are presenting today in this conference on the vision of Hamas and its positions addresses the reality and not just an anticipation of the future. Hamas has been working for the past 25 years –working and striving, and although it may slip up sometimes, it often and usually gets it right, and we ask Allah to accept our deeds.

Dear colleagues, I know that my speech is not just a speech, but a paper representing Hamas’s vision concerning the proposed subject [The Islamists of the Arab World & the Palestinian Issue].

First: Hamas’s Vision for the Palestinian Issue

Perhaps what will be stated is closer to being the fundamentals and declarations that are well known and recognized, but as reminders of the principles, basics and fundamentals, at this and at any time, are a very important matter. When we speak in this context, we do not only speak of Hamas as being simply an Islamic movement, but also as a national liberation movement, as well as an Islamic movement. Some of what we will put forth would fall under the category of fundamentals and principles, and some under policies and positions. These are summed up as follows:

1. Palestine, from its river to its sea, from its north to its south, is the land of the Palestinians; their homeland, and their legitimate right. We will not relinquish an inch or any part of it -for any reason or under any circumstances and pressures.

2. Palestine, in its entirety, is an Arab and Islamic land. It has Islamic and Arab affiliations and is considered a blessed and sacred land. Moreover, it has a special place in the heart of every Arab and Muslim, as well as standing and respect in all religions.

3. We will not, in any way, recognize the legitimacy of the occupation. This is a principled, political, and moral position. We do not recognize the legitimacy of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, nor do we acknowledge “Israel” or the legality of its presence on any part of Palestine no matter how long it remains, and Allah willing, this will not be long. All that has occurred in Palestine, including its occupation, settlements, Judaization, the changing of its landmarks and the falsification of facts in its regard is wrong and must end, Allah willing.

4. The liberation of Palestine is a national, domestic, and legitimate duty. It is the responsibility of the Palestinians, the Arabs, and the Islamic nation. It is also a humanitarian responsibility in accordance with the conditions of truth and justice.

5. Jihad and armed resistance is the correct and authentic means for the liberation of Palestine and the restoration of all rights. This battle must, of course, be accompanied by all forms of political, diplomatic, media, national, and legal resistance, as well as the investment of the entire nation’s energies and the summoning of all the elements of strength we possess.

6. Resistance is a means and not an end. If we had any other way to liberate the land, end the occupation, and regain our rights without the shedding of blood and other painful sacrifices, we would have taken it. However, the experiences of nations throughout history have proved that the only option available in expelling the occupiers, countering the aggression and restoring the land and rights of the people is resistance in all its forms, starting with armed resistance.

7. We are not fighting the Jewish people merely because they are Jewish. We are, however, fighting those who are Zionist occupiers and aggressors. We will fight anyone who tries to attack us, seize our rights or occupy our land regardless of their religion, affiliations, race or nationality.

8. The Zionist project is a racist, hostile, and expansionist project based on murder and terrorism. Hence, it is the enemy of the Palestinian people and nation and poses a real threat to them, as well as to their security and interests. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a danger to the security of the humanitarian community, its interests and its stability.

9. We hold on to Jerusalem and its Islamic and Christian sanctities. We will not give them up, nor will we relinquish any part of them. They are our right, our essence, our history, our present and our future. Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine and is cherished in the hearts of Arabs and Muslims as a sign of their status and pride. "Israel" has no legitimacy or right to Jerusalem at all, nor do they have any legitimacy or right to any part of Palestine. All Israeli actions in Jerusalem, such as Judaization, settlements, the falsification of facts and attempts to steal out history are unacceptable.

10. We stand firm on the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees and displaced individuals; their right to their homes from which they were expelled or were prevented from returning to, including in the occupied territories of 1948 or 1967, i.e., to all of Palestine. We refuse to compromise on this right in any way. At the same time, we reject all land resettlement and alternative homeland projects.

Brothers and sisters, this is an opportunity to pause at the "symphony" that plays from time to time; once there was a fear of resettlement in Lebanon, once there was a fear of resettlement in Jordan or an alternative homeland, and nowadays it is the Sinai. Oh brothers, to the Palestinian, there are no compensations for Palestine but Palestine. The actions of our people in the recent Gaza War and wars of the past, as well as in the on-going *Intifadahs* and revolutions is proof of this great nation's insistence on, and attachment to, their land.

11. The unity of the Palestinian land: The West Bank (including Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip, and the occupied lands of 1948 is one land comprising of all its geography; it is one unit, no part is separated from the other. It is, as a whole, the homeland of the Palestinian people. The current situation in Gaza, which some fear, is an exceptional case that has been imposed upon us, and not a normal situation. We cannot accept for Gaza to be separate from the West Bank, for they are one, and together they are a part of the Palestinian homeland.

12. We stand firm on the unity of the Palestinian people, both Muslims and Christians, and all its intellectual, political and ideological elements, as well as its resistance, militant, and political forces and factions.

13. The unity of the Palestinian political system and its institutions and the unity of its national authority through the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which needs to be rebuilt on valid grounds to include all Palestinian forces and components. The current division does not reflect our origin, nor does it reflect reality. This division has been imposed upon us after the international and regional forces rejected the results of the 2006 Palestinian elections in which Hamas was victorious. However, the unity of the Palestinian political system is key and we are sparing no efforts to achieve this, Allah willing.

14. Liberty first and then the state: a true state is the fruit of liberation, but a state that is the fruit of an agreement is merely an entity or a self-governing authority. Call it what you will, but a real state is the fruit of liberation first, and there is no alternative to establishing a Palestinian state with true sovereignty over the entire territory.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority is a reality we want to manage through a national partnership with others to serve our people, their rights, and their liberation project; in a manner that is consistent with their national fundamentals.

15. Independent Palestinian national decision: This is a principle that is based on non-dependency or reliance on any other country or party in the world, whether it be a friend, ally, enemy, or opponent. However, this does not mean, nor can we accept it in the context of limiting the Palestinian issue to the Palestinians and terminating or weakening the Arab and Islamic roles. The issue of Palestine was, and will remain, not only an Arab and Islamic issue, but also a humanitarian issue.

16. The establishment of national Palestinian institutions and authorities should always be based on democracy, starting with free and fair elections with equal opportunities. Moreover, the principle of partnership and national coalition work should be present in every phase, regardless of the chances of success, with emphasis on the fact that opposition is a legitimate right for everyone, provided that the opposition is constructive. In addition to this, everyone must refer to the results of the ballot boxes and respect the will of the people, as well as accept the peaceful exchange of authority. We must also be reminded that we are a special and unusual case since we are still living under occupation.

17. We will not intervene in the affairs of other countries, and we will not to engage in discussions, conflicts or alliances with other nations. We have adopted the policy of opening up to the different countries of the world, especially Arab and Islamic countries. We certainly strive to have balanced relations, the scale and standards of which will be in the interest and service of Palestine and its people and will support their steadfastness and determination. The criteria for these relations are, of course, the nation's interests and security and the rejection of dependency on any country or party in the world.

18. The unity of the nation, including all its ethnic, religious, and denominational elements. It is one nation in its interest and history; present, past and future, and we deal with it accordingly. As we acknowledge the diversity and variety in our nation, we realize the need for everyone in our nation to distance themselves from incitement and conflict, as well as to avoid taking sides on this basis. Instead, we must co-exist as we have in past centuries. Moreover, everyone in this nation must know their limits and claim their rights without violating the rights of others. The greater good of the nation must outweigh any sectarian or factional interests.

19. Any progressive tactical or detailed political program must be in line with the national Palestinian fundamentals that we have mentioned and may not go against or contradict them. Moreover, every partial or full judgement must be subject to this principle, and therefore, we reject any projects, agreements or peace settlements that diminish these fundamentals and principles and affects national Palestinian rights.

As you can see, this last point on the matter of fundamentals, policies, attitudes, and principles governs what precedes it or is an essential integral resolution of what has been mentioned.

Second: The Practical Application of Stances and Concepts

Some may wonder what the reality of this strong speech is? Where is its application on the ground?

We say that the movement's performance on the ground is similar to the performance of all humans; it may be right or wrong. However, in our case, as a movement, it has been mostly right, thanks be to Allah. Our performance is largely in line with our announced principles and values. Occasionally, there are gaps, mistakes, or sometimes ambiguous images that suggest there are contradictions or conflict with what is announced. However, we clearly say, even if we have a lapse

in judgement, or if some images are misleading, our standards are identical to the principles, fundamentals, policies, and attitudes we have mentioned.

I will give four examples to illustrate this:

1. Resistance: This is a primary principle and our strategic choice. Some have had doubts that talk of a truce is giving up on the resistance; this of course arbitrary. In short, the path of resistance, in terms of its preparation, organization, and performance for the liberation of Palestine, is a path that cannot be interrupted. In addition to this, the management of the decision of escalation and truce, as well as diversifying our methods and manners, all fall under the process of managing the decision, and not the principle of the decision, as the principle cannot be changed.

Moreover, even if the enemy and the settlers are out of Gaza, Gaza cannot be taken out of the circle of the conflict, even though necessity calls for the change of its role in the battle by virtue of its circumstances. Thankfully, Gaza is still a source of hope, not only for Palestine but for the entire region. We have just emerged from an aggressive war on the Gaza Strip, which was ended with a victory for the Palestinian resistance, which succeeded in ending the war on its terms.

In the case of the West Bank, the absence of the resistance for several years does not change its origin or principle, but is a necessity for our people due to the massive security pressures from every direction, near and far. We consider the decline of the resisting role inevitable and a forced reality we strive to overcome by upholding our intention and preparing for a new start. Allah willing, the resistance will return to the West Bank, reassuming its effective and essential role in every phase of the Palestinian struggle, as the enemy will not withdraw from our land without the pressure of resistance.

2. Participation in the Palestinian Authority: Doesn't this contradict with the movement's position on the Oslo Accords? This is a legitimate question, and there is no doubt that the matter is vague on the surface, but we believe the matter is clear. Our positions on Oslo and all the surrendering agreements are decisive with no hesitation. However, there are obligations that compelled us to obtain the authority to change its role, and make it combine the service of the people and the management of day-to-day affairs on the one hand, and the right to resist the occupation on the other. Today we are an authority in the Gaza Strip, however we resist, as well as develop and strengthen this resistance, with the realization that it is difficult to practically combine all these considerations. However, our support of the principles and our commitment to them, allows us to mold reality to our principles and not the other way around.
3. Agreeing to a state on the 1967 borders: Some worry that this is following in the footsteps of those before us, and eventually the big dream will shrink. To this we say no, we are not necessarily convinced that the liberation of the occupied territory of 1967 is a practical goal. Personally, I believe, in terms of the practical objective aspect, that anyone who can liberate the territories occupied in 1967, is able to liberate the rest of Palestine. Furthermore, there is a need to unify the Palestinian as well as the Arab stance on a common denominator upon which all parties agree, regardless of how that program may vary from one party to another. This is what drives us, the Hamas movement and other resistance movements, to take this

political stance as long as it is not at the expense of the rest of the Palestinian land and does not contain any abandonment of our rights or any part of our land, nor include any recognition of "Israel."

4. The matter of the division: This is also a reality that has been forced upon us, we did not choose it. As everyone knows, it was imposed on us in 2007 when several international and regional parties rejected the results of the 2006 elections. I attest to this, at a historical moment, that the division occurred on June 13th, 14th, and 15th 2007. On the 15th of that month, I called the Egyptian authorities and informed them we were ready to settle the matter and reconcile, because the division was not our choice, it was forced upon us. Since that time, we have been continuously working on putting an end to the decision, and strive to achieve reconciliation on national foundations that ensure the rearrangement of the Palestinian interior within the framework of the Palestinian Authority and PLO, and the adoption of a national political program that aligns with Palestinian fundamentals, rights, and national interests.

Third: The Changes in the Arab World and its Effects on the Issue, Hamas's Role and Potential Challenges

We now move on to the second part of the topic, which is the vision of the changes in the Arab world and its reflections on the issue and the role of Hamas, as well as the challenges and opportunities resulting from it. We can sum this up as follows:

1. In addition to its significance to the nation in the context of its historical regeneration, the "Arab Spring" is also a major strategic development in the path to liberating Palestine and facing the Zionist project. This is because Palestine's battle and liberation needs a strong and robust nation on its internal front, and a foreign policy that is also based on the people's will and has its independent approval.
2. There is no doubt that the Arab Spring has increased Israeli concerns and muddled up its calculations, because the rules of the game the enemy is accustomed to have begun to change. We will be satisfied with addressing the main points on this topic due to the limited time
3. We have no doubt that the Arab Spring and the changes it brought about in the Arab world give Hamas and the Palestinian resistance movements a chance to work in a better Arab environment that is more in line with the resistance, and more adherent to the national Palestinian fundamentals and rights.
4. Obviously, this spring and the major events succeeding it change the map of Hamas's political relations, and has added and impacted on it. Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco are certainly a qualitative addition to Hamas's political relations in comparison to their former relations. Keeping in mind that Hamas has had various relations with most Arab countries over the past two decades, the Arab Spring enhanced some of these relations, as we have mentioned, as well as continued some others and we are concerned with all of them.

As for the impact of the Arab Spring on the movement's relations, our well-known and distinct relationship with Syria is suffering and is known to all in light of current events. We did not wish for what happened to happen, and from the first moment, as history will attest, keen on things going another way. We want Syria to remain strong in terms of its security, stability and foreign policies which, over the last few years, have been aligned with the resistance. This is a historical truth, and with the Arab Spring and its natural shift to the Syrian arena, the Syrian people are no less concerned with democracy, freedom and involvement in decisions than any other Arab nation. We also hope that an internal policy is adopted that responds to the people's will. We have given many pointers in this direction, not as interference in internal affairs, but honest advice to lookout for Arab interests, including Syrian interests. Syria will remain the resistance's fortress, through its foreign policies based on an internal policy that satisfies its people and responds to its demands. However, unfortunately, things went in the tragic direction we are witnessing today. Resistance is not an official choice made strictly by countries, but has always been the choice of the people first, and when a leader feels his people support the resistance, he'll be stronger. The people have always supported the resistance, but some regimes support it, while others are negative towards it, and some are enemies of the resistance.

This is undoubtedly a model of our relations that have been impacted, and there are other examples known to all. Hamas, however, and this is an important point, has not moved from one axis to another, as Palestine and the Palestinian resistance is the essence of the resistance axis. Resistance, and the axis of resistance, is not just a hotel we merely stay in or leave, and resistance is not linked to geography. When the Hamas leadership was in Jordan, along with its presence inside Palestine, Hamas was supporting the resistance and exercising resistance. Later, even after we moved to Qatar, then Syria, then other countries such as Egypt, Hamas remained a resistance movement. Hamas has and will always be a supporter of the resistance and a resistance movement, regardless of its geographical location, because this is its essence and its strategic choice until, Allah willing, we liberate Palestine.

5. The Arab Spring and its major events temporarily distracted the world from the Palestinian issue, and this is certainly a loss, but a short and temporary loss. I say that the Arab nations have a right to pursue their interests and concerns, and we are sure that even when the Arab nations are busy with their internal affairs, Palestine is present in their minds, hearts, and in their chants. The last war on Gaza was renewed and concrete evidence of Palestine's status that never changes in the eyes of the nation, even when they are busy with their internal affairs and developments.

Fourth: Challenges and Problems Facing the Arab Spring and its Countries

It is clear that there are challenges and problems facing the Arab Spring and its countries that call for a series of observations and alerts. It is also essential for there to be a high degree of directness and transparency when dealing with this subject, for a leader does not lie to his people. Based on this, I will make a series of recommendations and blunt observations on this subject, only for the objective of contributing to the greater good of our great nation:

1. There is a need to strike a balance between internal priorities, meaning national concerns and national priorities, without conflicting with one another as success internally strengthens a country's foreign position, and vice versa. It is wrong to adopt the policy of retreating into oneself. What we are saying is that being concerned with the bigger issues does not only enhance a country's regional and international role, but also serves the country's internal policy in facing pressures and attempts

at external intervention. It is wrong to protect oneself by hiding away, instead, protect yourself with openness, taking initiative, and occupying yourself with larger issues.

2. It is necessary not to manage the large current phase in the nation's history from a small individual location, but from the broader context of the Arab and Islamic nation through cooperation and integration. I assure you that this serves the concerns, interests and the individual internal issues of a country. Economic, security, and political integration between the Arab countries, particularly during this difficult transitional phase that some Arab Spring countries are going through, serves these countries and their people and eases this transitional phase. The people and their leaders are in their own countries and are busy with their individual concerns, and this is their natural right, but while they are rebuilding their countries, they must think of the nation's concerns and interests! Where does it stand? What is its role? Where is its place under the sun? The nation has been a playing ground for others to play in and wrestle over, and it has been absent. The time has come for the nation to become a key player and contribute to re-building the regional map. This is the responsibility of everyone; we must build our countries and, at the same time, the greater Arab country. The Arabs have been absent for many decades, and today is the day they return to the stage and arena, not to wrestle with anyone, except for the Zionist enemy and anyone who invades their land, but to build a map of balance, integration, and cooperation along with the regional and neighbouring countries, without losing the Arab position or their role.

3. The relationship with the West and major countries must be managed, and this is normal in today's world for political, economic... purposes. However, this must not be at the expense of the Palestinian issue and the Arab role and responsibilities related to it. I say this while I am confident that the nation, Allah willing, is aware of this, but it is just a reminder. We believe that it is necessary not to give free concessions to the West while managing our relations with it. The legitimacy of the Arab Spring countries stems from their people's will, not foreign support, and addressing major issues strengthens these countries, not weakens them.

4. There is a need to raise the ceiling of the Arab stance, the Arab League, and the ceiling of every country in the political situation, particularly in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, it is necessary to reconsider and review the current Arab strategy. To begin with, this requires changing the political language. Yes, it is true that the people need time, but it is not right, after this Arab Spring, to keep the same language, same initiatives, same projects, and same attitudes. I know that full transformation and development requires time, but we must take the first step towards this now; the political language and terms of the Arab political dialogue must change. We must initiate and research change of the Arab strategy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, and from there, we must move towards changing the attitude towards the resistance and resistance movements. What used to be strange, rejected, or taboo in the past by the standards of the official Arab norms, such as not supplying the resistance with arms, must become possible today. A strategy must be drawn for the nation to study as it wishes, parts of which will be announced while others won't, how to support the resistance movements with funds and arms, and how to back it politically. This will be a strong message from the nation that times have changes, and the world must respect the nation's will, rights, and interests. It cannot remain biased to "Israel" and stand by helplessly while it disregards the nation and violates its rights, interests, and sanctities.

If there are no official wars between armies, the nation should at least support the golden option that has proved its worth, with the help of Allah, especially during the past years. Since 1967, "Israel" has not won a true war, unless we consider 1982, when it expelled the Palestinian revolution from Beirut and Lebanon. However, after that, "Israel" has not been victorious, neither in Lebanon or any part of Palestine, especially Gaza, and this is credited to, after Allah, the resistance, the heroes of the resistance, the weapons of the resistance, and the support of the nation.

Furthermore, there is a need to turn the page on old projects and initiatives, and search for new visions, projects, and strategies, beginning with obtaining real cards of strength, and keeping the nation's options open.

5. The peace settlement agreements and the positions of the countries that hold them, is certainly a heavy legacy that needs to be reconsidered. However, the question is how; in what way, and in which time context? What is so important now that it must be done. Political settlements and agreements with "Israel" are unfair to the nation and Palestine, they are not an advantage or inherent, nor is this a normal situation. "Israel" is not and will not be a friend or a neighbour, but an enemy not only to the Palestinians, but to the nation as a whole. If we characterize the agreements as such, we must make it a priority to address the relations, contact and normalization with the Israeli occupier. This is unacceptable, especially in light of the great Arab Spring, because at this point, the nation's leaders must realise that the anger of their people is not only a result of internal policies, but also a result of the nation's shame and weak position, policies, and strategies in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

6. With regards to the rise of Islamists to power and the significance and impact this has on the issue, this does not imply that Palestine only needs Islamists, or that Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, as national Islamic Palestinian powers, are only in need of Islamists due to their importance, distinction, and firm position towards the issue. On the contrary, we need all the nation's trends and elements; the Islamists, nationalists, liberals, and the left-wing. This is our nation, and we need everyone in it, and Palestine was and will remain a national issue. It is also necessary to disassociate ourselves from any divisions or sectarian, racial, or religious alignments. May Allah rid us of the hateful sectarianism that has spread over the region; May Allah rid us of racial, religious, and denominational divisions. Our nation has always been characterised with this beautiful diversity; this is a history that we have inherited, which has formed the nation's civilization and course throughout history. Today, it is wrong for us to explore these gaps, in which our enemies pour oil and fire to destroy us. This not only requires us to instil correct ideas and concepts, but also entails that our behaviour, as countries, movements, academics, or intellectuals must be in line with these positions and concepts, and does not promote sectarian or ethnic feelings.

In its Arab Spring, we want our nation to be unified as a nation, unified for Palestine, and we want it to build its internal front based on the interests of its people. Today, these people are thirsty for freedom, democracy, development, making a dignified living, progress, advancement and technology. At the same time, they look forward to having an advanced nation comparable to other nations, and a firm grip on managing their relations, foreign policies, and their battle with the Zionist enemy.

In conclusion, I would like to, once again, thank Al-Zaytouna Centre for giving us this opportunity. These are our humble experiences that we wished to present and convey to you, and perhaps it may be of benefit to you. We hope that Hamas continues, as it has always done, to meet your expectations and gain confidence.

May Allah bless you and Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatu Allahi wa Barakatuhu.

****Al-Zaytouna Centre would like to extend its thanks to Middle East Monitor (MEMO) for translating this paper.***