



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***ASSESSMENT OF HAMAS REGIME'S FOREIGN POLICY IN
PROTECTING PALESTINIAN NATIONAL INTEREST***

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**ASSESSMENT OF HAMAS REGIME'S FOREIGN POLICY IN
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By

ABEER A.S ALSARHI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

June 2016



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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my homeland Palestine; to the great martyrs and prisoners, the symbol of sacrifice; to my great parents, who never stop giving of themselves in countless ways; to my dearest husband Dr. Naji, who leads me through the valley of darkness with light of hope and support; and to my beloved kids: Zuhair, Abdullah, Ahmed yassin, Abd Al azeez, Mohammed, Anas and Nor.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

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June 2016

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Foreign policy is essentially about the protection and achievement of the national interest of a state. But has that been the case with Palestine? Palestine, as a developing state currently under Israeli occupation, needs a strong foreign policy to protect its national interest. This study aimed to evaluate the Palestine's foreign policies under Hamas regime during the 2006-2013 periods. This study carries four objectives namely, first, to explore the vision of Hamas regime on the Palestine's national interest. Second, to examine the principles adopted by Hamas regime in formulating its foreign policies. Third, to determine the factors that influence these foreign policies. Fourth, to assess Hamas' success in protecting the national interests. Data were collected from face-to-face interview with five key persons in Hamas (the Prime Minister, two ministers from Foreign Affairs, a head of foreign relations, and one scholar in Palestinian studies). The data were then transcribed, coded and analyzed with inductive and comparative methods. The study shows that Hamas views the liberation of land through resistance can protect the national interests. The results reveal six principles namely Islamic ethics and controls; a strategic vision of liberation; supporting the resistance; protecting the national interests; non-interference in internal affairs; and independence of decision. These principles are considered as guidelines to protect the national interests. Moreover, the results show that there are internal factors (political system, security, peace agreements, the leadership of Fatah) and external factors (international siege, Israeli occupation, international quartet conditions, and lack of support from other nations) that influence Hamas regime' relations. The study also shows that, despite the challenges Hamas faces, it has indeed succeeded in protecting them from threats both the national and international levels. Taken together, the study concludes that the foreign policies of Hamas Regime has greatly impacted on the protection of the national interests as reflected from its political visions, principles and practices in international relations.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENILAIAN TERHADAP DASAR LUAR HAMAS DI DALAM
MELINDUNGI KEPENTINGAN NASIONAL PALESTIN 2006 -2013.**

Oleh

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Dasar luar pada dasarnya adalah mengenai perlindungan dan menjaga kepentingan sesebuah negara. Tetapi apakah ini berlaku kepada Palestin? Palestin, sebagai negara membangun kini di bawah pendudukan Israel, memerlukan dasar luar yang kuat untuk melindungi kepentingan negara. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai dasar luar Palestin di bawah rejim Hamas dalam tempoh 2006-2013. Kajian ini bertujuan mencapai empat objektif iaitu, pertama, untuk menyelami wawasan rejim Hamas dalam mempertahankan kepentingan negara Palestin. Kedua, untuk mengkaji prinsip-prinsip yang diguna pakai oleh rejim Hamas dalam menggubal dasar luarnya. Ketiga, untuk menentukan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi dasar-dasar luar Hamas. Keempat, untuk menilai kejayaan Hamas dalam melindungi kepentingan negara. Data dikumpul daripada temu bual bersemuka dengan lima orang utama dalam Hamas (Perdana Menteri, dua menteri dari Luar Negeri, ketua hubungan luar, dan seorang sarjana dalam kajian Palestin). Data yang kemudiannya ditranskrib, dikodkan dan dianalisis dengan kaedah induktif dan perbandingan. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa Hamas menganggap pembebasan tanah melalui pendekatan tentangan boleh berperanan dalam melindungi kepentingan negara. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat enam prinsip digunakan iaitu: etika Islam dan kawalan, melindungi kepentingan negara; tidak campur tangan dalam hal ehwal dalaman; dan kebebasan untuk membuat keputusan. Prinsip-prinsip ini digunakan sebagai garis panduan dalam membentuk dasar bagi melindungi kepentingan negara. Selain itu, dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat faktor-faktor dalaman (sistem politik, keselamatan, perjanjian damai, kepimpinan Fatah) dan faktor-faktor luaran (pengepungan antarabangsa, pendudukan Israel, keadaan kuartet antarabangsa, dan kekurangan sokongan dari negara-negara lain) juga mempengaruhi sikap dan pendirian rejim Hamas. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan bahawa, walaupun Hamas berdepan berbagai cabaran, ia telah berjaya melindungi kepentingan negara daripada ancaman di peringkat kebangsaan dan antarabangsa. Secara amnya, kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa dasar luar Hamas telah banyak memberi kesan kepada perlindungan kepentingan-kepentingan negara seperti yang dapat dilihat dari visi politiknya, prinsip dan amalannya dalam hubungan antarabangsa.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 21 June 2016 to conduct the final examination of Abeer A.S. Alsarhi on her thesis entitled "Assessment of Hamas Regime's Foreign Policy in Protecting Palestinian National Interest" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Fatah	Palestinian National Liberation Movement
FP	Foreign Policy
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GS	Gaza Strip
Hamas	Islamic Resistance Movement
NI	National Interest
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
UN	United Nations
WB	West Bank

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Foreign Policy (FP), as a sub-field of International Relations (IR), focuses on the external behaviour of states in the global system through authorised representatives or governments (Tayfur, 1994). However, all countries, whether developed or under-developed, need to build their foreign policy upon the platform of national interest (Morgenthau, 2001). Morgenthau elaborates that: “The objectives of foreign policy must be defined in terms of the national interest and must be supported with adequate power” (Pham, 2008). The national interest had its historical beginning in the 16th and 17th century Europe and it became the universal practice in international politics and international relations justifying the foreign policy actions with the national interest (Albar, 2014).

A foreign policy geared towards pursuing the national interest can be considered as the bases of the realist school of international relations. Today, the concept of national interest is often associated with political realists who wish to differentiate their policies from idealistic policies that seek either to inject morality into foreign policy or promote solutions that rely on multilateral institutions which might weaken the independence of the state (Chigora, 2008). Many analysts, such as Hill (2003); Morgenthau (1978) and Rosenau (1967) assume that foreign policy is based on national interest. Thus, if one can identify a nation’s enduring strategic interests, its foreign policies would follow. Recent and far-reaching changes in the world present a challenge to leaders who make foreign policy as well as to those who study foreign policy (Beasley & Kaarbo, 2012).

As foreign policy is driven by both internal and external factors, it does not constitute such an independent realm (Rose, 1998). It is precise because the states are experiencing internal and external challenges, and transformations that entail the importance of foreign policy analysis. Foreign policy analysis as a distinct area of inquiry connects the study of foreign politics with domestic politics (Kaarbo, Lantis, & Beasley, 2002). Henceforth, with the appearance of modern nation states, new international relations appear as these nation-states’ tools to pursue some ideas, principles and standards that control their inter-communication in the international society. Simply, there is no nation which lives in isolation from the others, so it is an urgent issue for the nation states to mingle with each other. These actions constitute the foreign relations in such kinds of states (Hobson, 2000).

Palestine is one of the developing countries in the world (United Nations Sources, 2014) and its foreign policy cannot be the same with that of the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Canada and other developed states. Every nation of the world has its own strategies in formulating its foreign policies

depending on its respective interests, which include military power, land defense, technology and ideology among others (Beasley, Kaarbo, Lantis, & Snarr, 2012). Palestine, as a case in point, is a country under occupation (Manna', 2013) that needs to have strong strategies for its vision of liberation (Kafarneh, 2013). Palestinians have struggled for more than a century in the hope of achieving their national aspirations: the right for liberty, self-determination, and the right for returning to their occupied homeland (Palmer & Palmer, 2007; Khalidi, 1991). The Palestine crisis has been getting more complicated as the Fatah-led Palestinian government has continuously failed in its negotiations, thus failing to achieve the goals of liberation, self-determination, and the right of returning home (Sadeddin, 2014; Ganim, 2010; Khalidi, 2007). As a result of the absence of a strong policy to protect the national interest, which eventually led to the crisis, a change in the strategy is required (Sadeddin, 2014). The Palestinians never believed that negotiations alone could restore their national rights and ensure the return of the refugees to their homes and properties (Weiner, 1997; Tamari & Tamearei, 1996). They believe that armed resistance is required and this was the basis for the formation of the Hamas movement; it began its armed struggle from its first day, in addition to announcing its existence as an army resistance (Hroub, 2006). Conclusively, for the first time in Palestine's history, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) becomes the ruling party of the Palestinian government in 2006. Therefore, the foreign policy of such government deserves to be examined and analyzed.

1.2 Problem Statement

A primary concern of any nation is to have the foreign policy consistent to its national interests. This reality also applies to the Palestinian state under Hamas led government. The Hamas led government came into power after landslide victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections on January 2006 (Scham & Abu-Irshaid, 2009), despite of being rejected by the international, USA and Israeli from the outset (Abu-Helal, 2014). Some studies in the Palestinian politics and international relations seem to have only focused on the pretext against Hamas of being a government that supports resistance and being against Quartet conditions (Saleh, 2013; Zweiri, 2006). Others have focused on Hamas' commitments to its initial goals and demands (Abu-Helal, 2014; Lovlie & Knudsen, 2013). What is not yet clear is the assessment of the foreign policy of Hamas in line with protecting the Palestinian national interest. This study was therefore, conducted focusing on the vision of Hamas foreign policy to appreciate its strategic strengths for Palestine's liberation as a country under occupation by the Zionist regime.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in addressing political focus of Hamas as an Islamic Movement. Scholars such as El-Hamad and Al-Bargothi (2010); Hroub (2007) emphasize that Islam is Hamas' total ideological frame of reference, from which it draws its ideas and conceptions from the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah. This understanding provides some support for the conceptual premise that the Hamas's outlook in all aspects of life is inspired by the principles of Islam as its primary motive. Along with this growth intreserst in deep religious thinking, however, there is an increasing concern over Hamas' ability and flexibility to coexist with pragmatism without necessarily compromising its basic Islamic informed

Principles. Previous studies of Hamas' foreign policy have relatively not dealt in detail with this question. This means until recently, Hamas' ability to harmonize its principles have remained largely outside of previous researchers. For that reason, this study was conducted to unveil main principles of Hamas led government in defining its foreign policy alongside protecting the Palestinian national interests.

Central to the discussions on foreign policy of any government, understanding of its determinant factors has been thought of being a key issue to address (Rosenau, 1980; 1967). Since its inception, the Hamas led government through its foreign policy has been committed to make Palestine more secure, and it has been ready to defend and protect Palestinian national interests anywhere in the world (Saleh, 2013). However, previous studies seemed silent on issues related to Hamas' influential factors. The research to date has tended to remain soundless on how Hamas coexist with the challenges it has been facing amidst its focus to incorporate its influential factors to protect the Palestinian national interest. So far, there has been little qualitative analysis on addressing this particular issue. This research was conducted to fill this gap in knowledge and extend the perspectives on discussing the Hamas foreign policy in the filed of government and politics.

Based on the said problems, this study was conducted as humble contribution to the discourses in the field of politics and government. Taken together, the researcher sought to assess the combinations of the Hamas vision, principles and influential factors as underpinned its commitments to implement its foreign policy in favour of protecting Palestinian national interests amidst existing challenges on the ground.

1.3 Research Questions

To clearly understand Hamas Regime' foreign policy, the study therefore asks the following research questions:

- a. What is the vision of Hamas Regime on the Palestinian national interest?
- b. What are the main principles of Hamas Regime that determine its foreign policy?
- c. What are the influential factors in Hamas Regime's foreign policy?
- d. How does the foreign policy of Hamas Regime protect the Palestinian national interest?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

In order to answer the research questions, the following research objectives are presented:

- a. To explore the vision of Hamas Regime on Palestinian national interest.
- b. To examine the main principles of Hamas Regime's foreign policy.
- c. To determine the influential factors in Hamas Regime's foreign policy.

- d. To assess Hamas Regime Foreign Policy in Protecting Palestinian National Interest.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is important for several reasons. Firstly, the Palestinian issue is one of the most decisive and important matters in contemporary international conflicts and is considered as a violent and destructive conflict. As such, a conflict of such magnitude deserves to be studied and analyzed. Secondly, since its emergence in 1987, Hamas has made unique contributions to Islamic works in general and especially to life in Palestine. Hamas' contribution to the Palestinian society is of importance because they do so in several ways: through social support to the community, providing social welfare, and resisting Israeli occupation. As a multi-layered organization, Hamas has undergone substantial changes in its 27 years of existence. Hamas is also one of the few Islamic movements that came to power by democratic means. Therefore, the foreign policy of such a regime deserves to be examined and analyzed. Finally, many existing studies are historical, descriptive or self-reflective based on the experiences within the movement or from encyclopaedic studies. Most Israeli and Western studies are also framed by the concern for terrorism. In general, the existing literature focuses on the evolution of the movement's statements and positions, either over time or in relation to the changes in the political circumstances. Other studies have also dealt with certain aspects of the movement, for example, militaristic, financial or social. This thesis attempts to fill the void in those studies and the analysis here will provide an original contribution to understanding the important ideas of this movement. The understanding of Hamas and its foreign policy may boost their efforts in protecting the Palestinian national interest. Hence, this study is significant because it will provide the indispensable facts about the existing views of Hamas foreign policy.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study assesses Palestine foreign policy during the period of the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip (GS) from 2006-2013. Based on the problems, research questions and the objectives of this study, the main focus of the study is to examine Hamas as a Government from 2006-2013. This means that the main analysis of this research centers on the period when Hamas was the ruling regime in GS. Consequently, the study tends to explore the foreign policy of Hamas in protecting the Palestinian national interest in relation to the current challenges that it faces. The prime concern of the study is thus to ascertain how the Hamas regime's foreign policy serves the Palestinian national interest by studying Hamas as it presents and understands itself. Therefore, the focal point of the analysis will be the political actions of Hamas regime in dealing with the challenges of external relations.

1.7 Limitations

The study aimed at examining the foreign policy of the Hamas regime in the Palestine. As such, a number of limitations were present in the research work:

- a. The data was collected based on interviews conducted both in (Gaza Strip) and outside Palestine. In general, the Palestinian setting might be different in comparison to other nations and, therefore, the result of this study had to be carefully interpreted.
- b. An academic research that tend to provide alternative solutions to a given problem need to have time duration for the problem to be solved. On the other hand, some studies are expected to be completed within long periods such as between three to five years. Thus, the time duration limited the scope and period of this study.
- c. Monetary constraint was another aspect that hindered this study. It is important to note that this study was conducted in pursuit of academic excellence. This meant that the research work was not sponsored by, or received, any financial assistance from either the government or any organizations; the researcher had to use his own limited funds to conduct the research work. This had hindered the widening of the scope and place for data collection.
- d. Another restriction faced by this study was the literary resources because there were not enough studies on the foreign policy of the Hamas regime in particular. As such, the researcher had to translate some available literatures from the Arabic to the English language.
- e. In any research work, mobility is crucial. The study found it very difficult to move around and travel to conduct follow-ups on the informants due to the closed border of the Gaza Strip since it was under siege.
- f. This study evaluated the foreign policy of a government that was less than seven years old, in a period that was marked by two successive wars and international political and economic sieges, and was accused of terrorism. Therefore, the findings might not give a fair assessment of the results.

1.8 Definition of Concepts

For the purpose of clarification, the main concepts of the topics in this study are identified and explained. These are the general concepts for foreign policy and national interest.

1.8.1 Foreign Policy

The term “foreign policy” has been offered unique definitions by many scholars, historians and diplomats. Foreign policy has been described as “the actions of a state towards external environment and conditions usually domestic, under which these decisions are formulated” (Holsti & Holsti, 1995). In this study, foreign policy refers to a set of principles that define the objectives of governments and is then used to usher in their procedures at the international level. Foreign policy also clarifies the objectives that the country’s leaders have set to be achieved when facing certain situations. This includes the means to attain those goals.

1.8.2 National Interest

National interest is an elusive expression that has been referred to in numerous occasions. According to Jones (1970), national interest can be considered as an expression employed in political controversies within a country so as to emanate the case that the item of policy in mind will bring interests not merely to its supporters but also to its rivals as well. Frankel (1990) assumes that national interest is an important notion in foreign policy. According to him, it amounts to the total of all national values, national on all levels, in all what is related to the nation and the state. One general definition describes it as the common and continuing ends for which a nation takes action. This suggests that every nation has a set of aims or goals that moulds and strengthens the behaviour of such nation in international relations. Morgenthau (2001) for example, perceives it as only politics among nations. On the other hand, Kaplan (2005), describes national interest as the interest that a national actor has in implementing a specific process for a certain activity.

Therefore, in this study, national interest refers to the bedrocks upon which a government constructs its foreign policy's aims. In other words, foreign policies are shaped in order to advance the national interest.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This study evaluates the foreign policy of the Hamas regime. Chapter One presents the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, significance, scope and organization of the chapters. Chapter Two highlights two aspects: the first entails the literature review of the topic while the second explains the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter Three provides a brief understanding of Hamas' views and practices. In Chapter Four, the study discusses the methodology of the study. As for Chapter Five, it presents the data analysis and interpretation of the major findings of the study. Finally, Chapter Six states the summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

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