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# The Decision-Making in Hamas

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## Introduction

The problem, studied in this research paper is mechanisms, process and context of policy making of Hamas – the Palestinian national-liberation islamist organisation, treated by many political actors as terrorist.

Goal of the research is to outline the main stages of Hamas decision making, and how does the current political context influences them.

According to this goal, we will point out:

1. The general characteristic of Hamas (basically, what it is).
2. The political structure of the Hamas
3. Military, social and political policy of the Hamas (i.e.. what does this organisations actually do)
4. Stages and options of decision-making of the Hamas.

Research paper consists of Introduction, the Main part, where the tasks of our goal will be reviewed, and the conclusion, which is aimed to draw the line under all the information, mentioned above.

## Main part

### 1. The general characteristic of Hamas.

Hamas was founded in 1987 as a offshoot from Muslim Brotherhood. The primary document, defining aims and values is Hamas Covenant, also known as Hamas Charter,<sup>1</sup> issued

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<sup>1</sup> Hamas Covenant 1988. The Avalon Project. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp) Last access 16.11.2016

at August, 18, 1988 According to it, *“Israel, Judaism and Jews challenge Islam and the Moslem people”* (Article 28) and The Muslim Resistance Movement should be *“fighting against the false, defeating it and vanquishing it so that justice could prevail, homelands be retrieved and from its mosques would the voice of the mu’azen emerge declaring the establishment of the state of Islam”* (Article nine)

The governing body of Hamas is Majlis al-Shura (now renamed in the Shura Council), elected from members of local council groups and this in turn elected a 15-member Politburo (*al-Maktab al-Siyasi*) that made decisions at the highest level. Representatives come from Gaza, the West Bank, leaders in exile and Israeli prisons.. This organ was located in Damascus until the Syrian Civil War led it to transfer to Qatar in January 2012.<sup>2</sup>

Now Hamas is considered to be a legitimate political authority in Gaza Strip, after winning the elections in 2006.

Designated as a terrorist organization by a number of states.

## 2. The political structure of the Hamas

The exact nature of the organization remains unclear. Because of repetitious assassinations of its leaders, Hamas tends to conceal information concerning its inner structure. But, according to an information accessible in opened sources, the main characteristic of a political structure of Hamas is an apparent division on a military and social-political branches.

The governing body of Hamas is the Majlis al-Shura (General Consultative Council’). Majlis al-Shura is elected members of local council groups: from Gaza, the West Bank, leaders in exile and Israeli prisons, which then nominate representatives to the General Consultative Council. And General consultative council, in turn, elect a 15-member Politburo (*al-Maktab*

<sup>2</sup> Peter Mandaville. *Islam and politics*. London and New York. 2014  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=2bvcAwAAQBAJ&pg=PA282#v=onepage&q&f=f>

Antiwar.com. Emad Mekay. Donors Threatened aid cut after Hams win. <http://www.antiwar.com/ips/mekay.php?articleid=8>  
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Israel and, more broadly, the international community (including EU, USA, UN, the Arab countries). Then goes the evaluation. After evaluation, depending of the reaction of a major players, comes either the continuation of policy or its change. And than the circle starts again.

## Conclusion

So, according to goals of our research we have discovered:

1. What Hamas really is in general (structure, political aims, ideology, allies and enemies).
2. Which bodies are responsible for Hamas decision making.
3. Which factors affects Hamas decision making most of all.

Also we highlighted the differences between the military and political wings of Hamas and pointed out the stages of decision making differs in this two fractions.

Altogether, this research is of course, not exhaustive because of quite confidential structure of organization, its lack of transparency and responsibility, shortage of written sources in English, but also because of preconceived nature of the most of the sources. While Hamas is considered a terrorist organisation by number of the states, including the most [powerful ones, majority of articles and works about it (including academic ones) contain strongly biased assumptions and one-eyed evaluations, which also confuses the readers and puzzle the understanding of a problem.

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al-Siyasi) which makes decisions at the highest level.<sup>3</sup> Before the Syrian Civil War Political Bureau, which is considered to be leadership-in-exile, was situated in Damascus, Syria, but then moved to Qatar and Turkey.

Thus, while being a hierarchical structure, Hamas represents a top-down model, according to which grassroots-level operatives are responsive on local Shura Committee, local committees are responsive to a General Consultative Council, and the latter is responsive to a Political Bureau.

At the same time, the Hamas leadership can not be called fully homogeneous. As Matthew Levitt notices, «*The external leadership is divided into two main groups, one of Gazans led by second-in-command Mousa Abu Marzook, and one composed mostly of Hamas members from the West Bank who have studied or worked in Kuwait. The so-called Kuwaidia, or Kuwaiti group, is led by Hamas leader Khaled Mishal. The two factions work closely together, but there is some resentment of the Kuwaiti group by Marzook's faction, because Mishal's Kuwaidia tend to dominate key positions within the Hamas political bureau.*»<sup>4</sup>

The other fault line within Hamas is internal division onto radical islamists and those, for whom Palestinian national liberation stands on a first place.<sup>5</sup>

All in all, Hamas social wing leadership consists of:

- Hamas territorial Government (Gaza)

<sup>3</sup> Benedetta Bert. Armed political organizations: From conflict to integration. Baltimore. 2013. Armed Political Organizations: From Conflict to Integration [https://books.google.by/books?id=EUcDAAAQBAJ&pg=PA88&redir\\_esc=y#v=onep](https://books.google.by/books?id=EUcDAAAQBAJ&pg=PA88&redir_esc=y#v=onep)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Lewitt. Hamas's ideological crisis. Hudson institute. Novemver, 6, 2009. <http://www.hudson.org/research/9799-hamas-s-ideological-crisis> Last access 17.11.2016

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Lewitt. Hamas's ideological crisis. Hudson institute. Novemver, 6, 2009. <http://www.hudson.org/research/9799-hamas-s-ideological-crisis> Last access 17.11.2016

- Gaza Shura council (Gaza)
- Hamas political Buerau (Damascus)
- Head Shura Council (Damascus)
- West Bank Shura Council (West Bank)
- Prisoner Shura Council (Israel)<sup>6</sup>

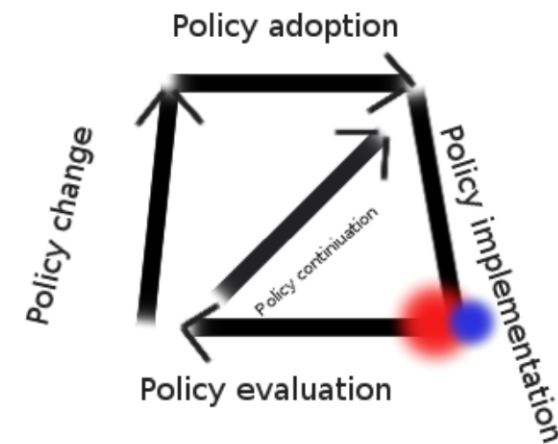
Military wing of Hamas is represented by Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigades. It was founded in 1991 and enjoys quite a high degree of independence from the Hamas leadership. As some scholars note, Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigades is an organization, submitted to a Hamas overall political goals and ideology, but not to its leaders. *“The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigade is a separate armed military wing, which has its own leaders who do not take their orders [from Hamas] and do not tell us of their plans in advance.”* – they quote the senior Hamas official.<sup>7</sup>

Such an independent policy is based on prudence and circumspection, which is ultimately needed in an activity of Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigades due to the permanent Israel persecution of their leaders and operatives – since 2010 Israel assassinated no less than 17 of them.<sup>8</sup> So military wing of Hamas is in need to protect itself by maximum secrecy and conspiracy, which would not be possible along with formal affiliation with political wing.

<sup>6</sup> Jodi Vittori. Terrorist financing and resourcing. USA, 2011. [https://books.google.nl/books?id=ra\\_GAAAAQBAJ&pg=PA193&redir\\_esc=y#v=one](https://books.google.nl/books?id=ra_GAAAAQBAJ&pg=PA193&redir_esc=y#v=one)

<sup>7</sup> Ilana Kass & Bard E. O’Neill. The Deadly Embrace: The Impact of Israeli and Palestinian Rejectionism on the Peace Process, University Press of America. 1997, p. 267 <https://books.google.com/books?id=ApANDp1XzmgC&dq=hamas+qassam+brigades>

<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia. List of Israeli assassinations. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Israeli\\_assassinations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Israeli_assassinations). Last access 17.11.2016



● Israel reaction

● International community reaction



normally made by consensus. But this consensus is influenced by the stance the particular leadership faction has at that time”<sup>22</sup>

According to it, we can assume that during the evaluation of the Hamas policy each wing of those fractionaries tend to use drawback and blunders of the other one to take it over and seize the authority within the organisation.

So, concluding the results of a Hamas decision-making, we can refer to Matthew Lewitt’s evaluation: “As a government, Hamas has failed to provide for the needs of its purported constituents and remains an international pariah under economic siege.”<sup>23</sup>

This evaluation is quite arguable, because we can see that Hamas takes leading positions in Gaza strip for more then 10 years, successfully draws international support., took over his major rival – Fatah movement and successfully oppresses the potential opponents such as Pro-Al-Qaeda salafi jihadists. And therefore, it manages to satisfy the needs of the governed, and provide for their needs, because otherwise they would already overthrow it. It seems quite easy while the great amount of guns, owned b the Gaza population.<sup>24</sup>

## Hamas policy scheme

After the policy adoption comes policy implementation. After it comes the reaction of a major players of the region – the

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<sup>22</sup> Marc A. Walther. Hamas between violence and pragmatism. Monterey, California. 2009. [http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/4673/09Jun\\_Walther.pdf?sec](http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/4673/09Jun_Walther.pdf?sec) Last access 17.11.2016.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Lewitt. London. 2006. Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad. <https://books.google.lt/books?id=CG-AjU3rraQC&pg=PA9&1pg=PA9&dq=Majlis+>

<sup>24</sup> Cam Simpson. As Guns Flood Gaza Strip, Palestinian Citizens Stock Up. The Wall Street Journal. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB118221915332739990> Last access 21.11.2017.

## 3. Military, social and political policy of the Hamas (i.e. what does this organisations actually do)

Military activity of Hamas includes:

1. Attacks on Israel territories by Qassam rockets
2. Suicide attacks in Israel cities
3. Waging war between rival political and jihadist groups inside Gaza, such as Fatah, Al-Qaeda affiliated groups and others.
4. Kidnapping Israel solders for further exchange on Hamas military operatives and other Palestinian prisoners.

Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades are listed as a terrorist organisation by the European Union, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Egypt.

Political wing of Hamas provides diplomatic efforts, charity (dawah) and media coverage. As Matthew Lewitt assumes, «The social welfare and political wings are the public faces of the group’s social, administrative, political, and propaganda activities»<sup>9</sup>

The example of diplomatic efforts are attempts of political leadership of Hamas to draw the support of various international organizations – not only Islamic, but also human rights and leftist ones – which Khaled Madhal call «liberal» powers of the world.

Hamas charity is represented by re-allocating the money, collected by supporters abroad to different social needs, such as

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Lewitt. Hamas’s ideological crisis. Hudson institute. Novemver, 6, 2009. <http://www.hudson.org/research/9799-hamas-s-ideological-crisis> Last access 17.11.2016

payments to families of a fighters, assassinated by Israel, «*construction projects, including schools, cultural centres, mosques, orphanages, and for hospital equipment and treatment costs*».<sup>10</sup>

Media coverage is producing mostly political propaganda with strong anti-Semitic and Islamist implications. It also makes a great importance in political mobilization and military recruitment.

One of the most obvious examples are the children TV-Shows on Al-Aqsa TV starring bee Nahul or Hamas Mickey Mouse who teaches children to beat or kill the Jews.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Stages and options of decision-making of the Hamas

First of all while surveying the decision making in Hamas, we should outline the main principles of its agenda-setting of its military wing.

a) For military wing we can consider that the main agenda-setters are its direct enemies, who are Israel, and rival political groups inside Gaza Strip and West Bank.

Israel is an agenda-setter, because its eliminating is a program goal of Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigades. Hence, Israeli military operations, such as efforts to pacificate Gaza, or assassinations of Hamas commanders, create reasons to respond and thus construct the agenda of an organizations. In the same time we can say, that the very existence of Israel creates for Hamas an “eternal” agenda point: to attack by any means. Because

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Lewitt. London. 2006. Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad. <https://books.google.lt/books?id=CG-AjU3rraQC&pg=PA9&lpg=PA9&dq=Majlis+>

<sup>11</sup> Hamas to kids: shoot all the jews. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ORAM-usqhQ> Last access 17.11.2016

Hamas Mickey Mouse teaches terror to kids. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gi-c61bFGC4> Last access 17.11.2016

Israel. One of the most typical example is when Hamas threaten to denounce past agreements of Palestinian national authority with Israel, the former implemented punitive economic measures against the Gaza Strip, also UN and USA cut of their financial aid.<sup>20</sup>

- Corruption. The Hamas is relative corrupted organization,<sup>21</sup> and this fact considerably affects its effectiveness, embarrasses the implementation of decisions and spoils its image abroad.

Policy evaluation in Hamas is quite vague, but according to what we have discovered, we can assume that it is the reaction and assessment of decision-makers within Hamas (first of all it is General Consultative council, then the Political Bureau and local Shura councils), which definitely includes Israeli and international community reaction, and, in a limited extent, the reaction of the citizens of governed territory (Gaza Strip).

Also, some scholars put out a statement about two distinct fractions within Hamas (the more Islamist one and the more secular-nationalist one): “*The two different leaderships inevitably lead to tension within Hamas. As the analysis of the center of gravity will show, the cohesion of the movement is of utmost importance for Hamas. Therefore, the decisions are*

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<sup>20</sup> Antiwar.com. Emad Mekay. Donors Threatened aid cut after Hamas win. <http://www.antiwar.com/ips/mekay.php?articleid=8460>. Last access 21.11.2016.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Beaumont. Corruption hampers effort to rebuild Gaza after summer conflict. The Guardian. December 25, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/25/corruption-hampers-effort-> Last access 21.11.2016.

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Thus, we can observe, that necessity to fit international standards of “respectable organization which is worth negotiations” affect the Hamas agenda (at least on public) making it more moderate and secular.<sup>18</sup>

Even the basic document of Hamas – the Hamas Covenant is in some degree denounced by this need.<sup>19</sup>

Hamas policy implementation starts after decisions are taken by General Consultative Council and The Political Bureau. In Gaza the direct rule if Hamas is exercised on five districts: Deir al-Balah Governorate, Khan Yunis Governorate, Rafah Governorate, North Gaza Governorate, Gaza Governorate with separate administration in each of them.

While speaking about implementation of Hamas policy we should take into account two prominent factors which have crucial influence on it. Those are:

- Israeli influence. Most of the decisions, made by Hamas, even non-political ones, have certain reaction from the

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The Israel Times. Hamas calls UNESCO vote on Jerusalem ‘victory’ for Palestinians October 18, 2016. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-calls-unesco-vote-on-jerusalem-victory> Last access 21.11.2016

BBC News. Hamas leader Meshaal warns of Israeli ‘extremism’ after elections. April 1, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32060613> Last access 21.11.2016

<sup>18</sup> Wikipedia. The free encyclopedia. Statements by Hamas members and clerics to an international audience. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas#Statements\\_by\\_Hamas\\_members\\_and\\_clerics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamas#Statements_by_Hamas_members_and_clerics) Last access 21.11.2016

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<sup>19</sup> Jane Adas. Mazin Qumsiyeh on the History and Practice Of Non-violent Palestinian Resistance. Washington Report on Middle East affairs. <http://www.wrmea.org/2010-may-june/mazin-qumsiyeh-on-the-history-and-practice> Last access 21.11.2016.

Hamas views this country as a totally illegal and illegitimate, and moreover, was created with a goal of destroying, the very fact of judicial status-quo dictates an agenda of a certain military acts.

Rival military and political groups are also agenda-setters for the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigade, because they perform threat for Hamas military and political dominations in Gaza. Thus, Hamas attacks them in advance, to prevent them from becoming a real threat.<sup>12</sup>

The other agenda-setters of Izz ad-Din Al-Qassam brigades can be called the Gaza population.

But its capability of setting the agenda is quite limited because the character of Gaza governance can be hardly called democratic. After winning the elections and taking over in internal conflict with Fatah, Hamas established its primacy in Gaza government, and none democratic elections were ever held again. Moreover, Hamas has a monopoly for arms in governed territories, and is blamed in repeated acts of torture, arrests and arbitrary detentions of political rivals and suspected collaborators with Israel, for limiting the freedom of speech, civil rights and for forcing islamisation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Saleh Al-Naami. Hamas versus Al-Quaeda. Global research. 12 July 2007. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/hamas-versus-al-qaeda/6388>. Last access 17.11.2016

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<sup>13</sup> Khaled Abu Toameh. PA bans journalists from reporting human rights abuses. The Jerusalem Post. 06.08.2011.

Iran is a country which financially support Hamas in a very profound way – by the late 2000s it constituted about 1/4 of Hamas budget, while requiring video proofs of attacks on Israel.<sup>14</sup> Such kind of relationships lets us assume that Iran may be also in some extent on agenda setter by inspiring or even ordering Izz ad-Din al-Qassam brigade to attack Israel in a certain time or in a certain way.

And the latter have to obey because of a great financial dependence.

Implementation of Hamas military wing policy can be described in a dual options: either attack or do not attack Israel. Almost any attack traces the inevitable response by the Israel, and the result of this response (bombings, Hamas leaders assassinations, military operations in Gaza or West Bank) is assessed in terms of planning the further attacks and military policy. As Marc A. Walther states, “*Hamas possesses a structured decision-making capability by which violence is applied after a cost-benefit analysis, and which distinguishes it from a solely radical group. Furthermore, Hamas was not only mobilized upon existing structures, it maintained and further developed these structures.*”<sup>15</sup>

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<http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/PA-bans-journalists-from-reporting-hum>  
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<sup>14</sup> Jodi Vittori. Terrorist financing and resourcing. USA, 2011.  
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<sup>15</sup> Marc A. Walther. Hamas between violence and pragmatism. Monterey, California. 2009.  
[http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/4673/09Jun\\_Walther.pdf?sec](http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/4673/09Jun_Walther.pdf?sec)  
Last access 17.11.2016.

At the same time the exact process of policy evaluation and analysis in Hamas military wing is quite vague and can not be drawn from the available sources because of subterranean nature of the organization.

b) For political wing main external agenda-setters are both Israel and international community.

The first one, like in the case of military wing is an “eternal” agenda-setter, because its very existence gives rise to existence of Hamas.

The international community is an agenda-setter because of high dependence of Hamas and, more broadly, the whole Palestinian liberation movement from international support. J. Vittori states: «*Hamas’s budget, calculated to be roughly \$US70 million (2011), is derived in large part (85%) from foreign, rather than internal Palestinian, sources. Only two Israeli-Palestinian sources figure in a list seized in 2004, while the other contributors were donor bodies located in Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Britain, Germany, the United States, United Arab Emirates, Italy and France. Much of the money raised comes from sources that direct their assistance to what Hamas describes as its charitable work for Palestinians, but investments in support of its ideological position are also relevant, with Persian Gulf States and Saudi Arabia prominent in the latter.*»<sup>16</sup>

The diplomatic efforts of Hamas to draw international support are also profound, as we can see Hamas leaders being active in contacting with foreign diplomats and in UN structures, trying to legitimize itself and strengthen anti-Israel attitude in an international community.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jodi Vittori. Terrorist financing and resourcing. USA, 2011.  
[https://books.google.nl/books?id=ra\\_GAAAAQBAJ&pg=PA193&redir\\_esc=y#v=one](https://books.google.nl/books?id=ra_GAAAAQBAJ&pg=PA193&redir_esc=y#v=one)

<sup>17</sup> Memo Middle East monitor. Hamas calls the UN to end Palesstinian suffering. January 28. 2016.  
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