

Hamas and the Gaza war of 2014 : developments since the arab spring in Palestine

著者	Nishikida Aiko
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* Associate Professor, Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa,
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

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INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO
3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI
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**Hamas and the Gaza War of 2014:
Developments since the Arab Spring in Palestine¹**

Aiko NISHIKIDA, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa,
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

This paper demonstrates the impacts of the Arab Spring on Palestine's internal and international politics. It also indicates their links with the subsequent Gaza War in the summer of 2014. A special focus is on Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was already in power before 2011, though under pressure because of economic sanctions and denial of recognition. Considering such pressure, the associated developments can be explained as a natural consequence.

Introduction

There has been political turmoil since the Arab Spring, which brought into prominence the presence of Islamic movements in every country of the Arab world. Among them, the Muslim Brotherhood attracted the world's attention when it seized power in some of these countries, including Egypt (*Ḥizb al-Ḥurrīya wa al-'Adāla*) and Tunisia (*Ennāhda*). In the case of Palestine, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood was observed long before the turmoil. Hamas (*Ḥaraka al-Muqāwama al-Islāmīya*)—an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine—ascended as a resistance movement against Israel and assumed the position of a political party. While its victory in the parliamentary election in 2006 was not accepted by European countries and their allies, Hamas has played a significant role in Palestinian and regional politics.

¹ This paper was drafted in March 2015, based on the research findings of IDE-JETRO research project in FY2013-2014 entitled “The Society of the Muslim Brothers and International Linkage of Islamic Movements.”

As Hamas was already in a position of power as an Islamic movement, what kind of impact has the Arab Spring had on it? How has the dynamism of regional politics subsequently affected its position? How can we explain the occurrence of the Gaza War in the summer in 2014 in its political context? These questions will be addressed in this paper.

As will be shown below, several articles have dealt with the impact of the Arab Spring on Palestine. There are also other analyses of Hamas and its engagement in the Gaza War of 2014 (Chorev 2013; Ezbidi 2013; Milton-Edwards 2013.) However few studies have combined those two phenomena and indicated the correlation or cause-effect relations between them. This paper focuses on this issue and points out the development of linkages between these two events.

1. Impacts of the Arab Spring in Palestine

In the wake of the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, a relatively calm response was evident in Palestine. There were demonstrations by Palestinian youth in the streets of Gaza and the West Bank to protest against the political situation. The largest demonstrations took place on March 15, 2011, and their slogan was: “*al-sha‘b yurīd inhā’ al-inqisām* (the people demand the end of the split [between Gaza and the West Bank])” This demand was based on the continued political division between the two governments in the West Bank and Gaza, represented, respectively, by Fatah and Hamas. No voice was heard, as in Egypt, demanding “*isqāt al-nizām* (bring down the regime).”

Another occasion for protest was Nakba Day² on May 15, 2011. This became an international movement, although still inspired by the ongoing uprisings across the Arab world. Palestinians from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank got together on the Syrian side of the border in the Golan Heights and attempted to cross the Israeli border. For that action, they used social media to call for mass protests throughout the region.

² *Nakba* is an Arabic term means “catastrophe.” In this context, it indicates the day of independence for Israel, which at the same time tragically inflicted the condition of being dispersed refugees on the Arabic Muslims and Christians who used to live in Palestine.

This movement shares some characteristics in common with other Arab Spring movements, such as being a mass popular movement, and mobilization through internet networks. However, it also has significant differences derived from the political structure in Palestine. First, people did not demand the current government's removal from power; rather, they hoped it would consolidate power to be able to govern the situation and gain stability. The movement happened because of the split within the government and its lack of authority. Second, the mobilization did not cover the entire area under the Palestinian Authority's control. It happened rather sporadically in specific areas within the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights, with coordination confined within each area. This was because of the separation between the areas under the control of different governments, and under occupation by Israel. Third, in contrast to the other movements, the mobilization network sometimes transcended international borders and appealed to Palestinians overseas. This was because of the prolonged conflict that affected Palestinian refugees and dispersed them all over the world.

However, the movement did not last long and the youth ended their protest, both on the streets and on Facebook after a year. The momentum was not retained and the demonstrations eventually came to naught (Høligilt 2013, 344).

Why, then, did the movement not persist? One explanation lies in the political anomie observed among the "self-absorbed generation" (*al-Jil al-Maṣlahaji*, mentioned by Chorev 2014). Accordingly, Palestinian youth are viewed as focusing on self-advancement rather than on national goals (Chorev 2014, 2). Another explanation suggests a widespread sense of fatigue among the youth because of the low achievements of previous struggles. These include the first and second *Intifada* for which many spent long periods in prisons, paid high costs, and made sacrifices, only to face deteriorating conditions under the occupation (Høligilt 2013, 348). This can also be explained by the absence of links between Gaza and the West Bank, which has pushed them politically and socially apart, further challenging the viability of a united movement. All these reasons accord less importance to the movement spurred by the Arab Spring among Palestinians in the occupied territories.

2. Impacts of the Arab Spring on Regional Politics Surrounding Hamas

Compared to its low impact within Palestine, the Arab Spring significantly affected the outside world and shifted the balance of power in the Middle East. From Hamas's point of view, the situation was considered to be beneficial. The leader of its political bureau, Khaled Mishal, noted: "Obviously, the revolutions and the major events succeeding them change the map of Hamas' political relations, and have added to and impacted on them" (Milton-Edwards 2013, 64). There are three factors that have especially affected Hamas's political position in the region: the civil war in Syria, upheavals in Egypt, and support from Turkey and Qatar.

The first factor, the conflict in Syria, has had negative impacts on Hamas within the regional alliance. Until the Arab Spring, Hamas constituted one of the sub-state actors belonging to the "Resistance Axis (*Mihwar al-Muqāwama*)," which included Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the (Palestinian) Islamic Jihad. This was a concrete alliance based on a framework of shared identity in confrontation with Israel, strong opposition to pro-Western Arab regimes, and the promotion of an Islamic-based political order (Chorev 2013, 1–2). The religious cleavage between the Sunni and Shi'i factions was overcome because of this framework.

In order to sustain the alliance, Hamas tried to avoid taking a clear stance on the conflict in the beginning, as it was indebted to the Assad regime for its support of the Palestinian cause. Also, breaking with Syria would have angered Iran, which had been Hamas's largest financial backer. It has been estimated that Iran has contributed at least 280 million US dollars annually to the Hamas entity in Gaza in recent years; much of this through arms (Ezbidi 2013, 101). However, the prolonged civil war in Syria did not allow for neutrality and compelled Hamas to change its position. Hamas's leading figures, Khaled Mishal and Mūsa Abū Marzūk, made the decision to move away from Syria, both physically and ideologically, and to distance Hamas from the Assad regime.³ Hamas's

³ Author's interview with Abdul Sittār al-Qāsem, former professor of political science at An-Najah University (February 24, 2014 in Nablus).

leader in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, declared his support for the Syrian people in a speech at the al-Azhar mosque in Cairo in February 2012 (Milton-Edwards 2013, 65). After that, Hamas finally closed its office in Damascus and most of its officials left Syria in November 2012.

The second factor, the upheaval in Egypt, brought the political status of the Muslim Brotherhood up and down. After the ousted president, Hosni Mubarak, was ousted, it was expected that opportunities for release from oppression and rebuilding in Gaza would increase tremendously. This was because the new government in Egypt was based on the Muslim Brotherhood, which was the mother organization of Hamas. In the beginning, this expectation seemed to be materializing as Egypt agreed to open the Rafah Crossing in the reconciliation deal it brokered between Hamas and Fatah in April 2011 (Sherwood 2011). However, the developments that followed demonstrated that Hamas could not expect such unconditional support for its actions. Within the new government under Morsi, the dominant Islamist parties failed to reach an understanding with other secular parties over important political issues. As a result, they could not adopt a new strategy, and past approaches were maintained and reinforced through diplomacy. Restrictions at Gaza's Rafah Crossing were not eased, and Gaza's citizens remained confined within the border (Ezbidi 2013, 101).

Nevertheless, the Morsi government did help the situation in Gaza by ignoring the illicit trade known as the "tunnel economy." The economy of Gaza has largely relied on this as the imports available via Israel hardly satisfied the necessities of life. The prices of goods were as high as those in Israel—which were three times higher than Egyptian prices—and the kinds of goods allowed for import were limited for security reasons. In addition, Hamas enriched itself by collecting tolls from tunnel operators and import taxes on goods brought into Gaza.

After the second revolution or military coup d'état in July 2013, the situation rapidly worsened. The removal of President Morsi from power and the subsequent disputes in Cairo included charges made against Hamas, which was accused of being a co-conspirator with the Egyptian Brotherhood (Milton-Edwards 2013, 63). As a

punishment, and to deter its further empowerment, the Egyptian government under President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi flooded the smuggling tunnels in Gaza with sewage water and destroyed them. The destruction of the tunnels raised the prices of all commodities and drove Gaza's economy to an even worse state than it was in during the period of the Mubarak government.

Third, while they lost their strategic base and support from Syria and Egypt, Hamas gained support from another source: the pro-Brotherhood countries. Turkey, through AKP's leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has shown its solidarity with the Muslim Brotherhood, including Hamas. The dispatch of a huge ship, the *Mavi Marmara*, for providing humanitarian support as part of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla campaign symbolized its sympathy toward the people living under the occupation. IHH, a Turkish charity organization, initiated the action. However the Turkish government vehemently supported the action and denounced Israel's attack on the ship as a "massacre" (Ravid 2010).

Qatar is another country that elevated its support of the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring. Its emir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al-thani, offered an assistance package worth 400 million US dollars during his visit to Gaza in October 2012. Moreover, he was the first head of state to officially visit the Gaza Strip since economic sanctions were imposed on Hamas in 2006. Welcoming the act, Taher al-Nunu, the spokesperson of the Hamas government, made this comment: "He is the first Arab leader to break the political siege" (Al Jazeera 2012). The visit was also clearly designed by Qatar to boost its claims to regional leadership and its support for the Palestinian issue, especially the Hamas movement (Milton-Edwards 2013, 67; Stephens 2012).

These three factors changed the position of Hamas in the region. Deterioration of the relationship with Syria damaged the alliance of the "Resistance Axis" and isolated Hamas within the political map of the Middle East. The Egyptian military coup d'état in July 2013 threatened Hamas directly as the new government devastated the economy in Gaza by closing the smuggling tunnels. However, new sponsors such as Turkey and Qatar emerged to support Hamas, politically and financially. These background circumstances

prompted the Gaza War of 2014 and motivated Hamas to take actions toward the Palestinian Authority and Israel. The next section examines the links between them in the chronology of the war's development.

3. Development of the Gaza War of 2014

1) Political Developments

While its direct impact was limited, the short-lived uprising in Palestine at the beginning of the Arab Spring brought about unexpected success. People's demand for political unity was achieved through the national reconciliation agreement of May 2011. Fatah's President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas's leader Khaled Mishal attended the ceremony in Cairo and signed the agreement. It included programs of action toward a Palestinian unity government. However, the government was not formed until 2014 because of disagreements in the coordination details.

In 2014, after the deadlock of the peace talk mediated by the US Secretary of State, John F. Kerry, Fatah leaders left the negotiation table with Israel and shook hands with the political leaders of Hamas. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was infuriated and denounced Fatah's decision. He repeated his stance since the first reconciliation in 2011, demanding that "the Palestinian Authority must choose either peace with Israel or peace with Hamas," as "there is no possibility for peace with both" (Ravid 2011). In accordance with his statement, Fatah's choice suggested a decision of political redirection. Fatah had been sustaining its fame within the international community through peace negotiations with Israel. Its status as a negotiating partner in the peace talks had justified its power within the Palestinian Authority, although it was no longer an elected representative of the Palestinian people.⁴ By forming the Palestinian unity government with Hamas, Fatah took an alternative policy route. It did not change its original stance, but tried to achieve another kind of fame by responding to the demands of the Palestinian people.

⁴ Fatah was not elected as a dominant party in the election of the Palestinian Legislative Council. (Parliament) in 2006. Also, the terms of the members of parliament had expired in 2010, and that of the President of the Palestinian Authority had expired in 2009.

Surprisingly, the unity government was welcomed and gained recognition from many countries within the international community. The European Union and the United Nations offered public backing the day after the swearing in of the government in Ramallah. The United States even preceded them with its recognition of “an interim technocratic government that does not include ministers affiliated with Hamas,” according to the State Department spokeswoman, Jen Psaki (Ma’an 2014a). Needless to say, the Israeli government showed resentment toward the move, but had no power to stop the wave of recognition.

While it was difficult to oppose the alteration of the political landscape for Palestine, another significant event occurred in June–July which again rocked the situation. The first impact came through the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers around the Gush Etzion settlement in the West Bank. The Israeli government launched Operation “Brother's Keeper” to rescue them. However after a long search mission conducted all over the West Bank, they were found murdered on June 30. The abduction and murder incurred strong criticism both from the government and the people of Israel.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the murderers of the three kidnapped teenagers “beasts,” and claimed, “Hamas is responsible, and Hamas will pay” (Ravid, Lis and Ha’aretz 2014). Even though there was no clear evidence of Hamas’s involvement, from the beginning of the operation, the houses of members and affiliates of Hamas were searched, and more than 400 Palestinian suspects were arrested in the West Bank. From one perspective, the operation was aimed at weakening Hamas’s political presence. The assumption here is that just as Egypt’s President Sisi worked systematically to prevent a “political revival” of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, so the Israeli government worked—using the IDF and Shin Bet—to thwart the possibility of Hamas taking over Palestinian streets in the West Bank (Ben-Yishai 2014). The massive scale of arrests depleted the executive power of political leaders of Hamas and practically damaged the Palestinian unity government. Gaza was bombarded as it was difficult for the Israeli police and army to enter and arrest people there. Those attacks and operations eventually escalated into the Gaza War in the summer of 2014.

Another impact on the Gaza War came from the Egyptian side. The change of government from Morsi to Sisi transformed the Muslim Brotherhood from being the dominant party to being the target of persecution. Punishment began to be imposed on Hamas, an organization that originated from and was still considered to be affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, by the post-Brotherhood military government. Sisi began clamping down on hundreds of smuggling tunnels on the Egyptian border. In January 2014, the amount of goods entering Gaza through the tunnels had been cut by 95 percent. Gaza suffered overall losses of more than \$500 million in all sectors, according to a spokeswoman for Hamas (Kershner 2014). Such devastating damage drove Hamas to take steps to ameliorate the situation, first by joining the unity government with Fatah and gaining international recognition.

However, the unity government faced hardship soon after it was sworn in on June 2, 2014. After only ten days, the controversial kidnapping of the Jewish teenagers happened and they were found murdered at the end of June. The revenge murder of a teenage Palestinian boy in East Jerusalem provoked anger among Palestinians, both in Jerusalem and in the occupied territories. Because of the intense riots, there was even a rumor of the beginning of the Third *Intifāda* (popular uprising against Israel) (Brenner et al. 2014). The mass protest encouraged Hamas to launch reprisal attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip. This became Hamas's second step for influencing the situation: extracting concessions through military threats and negotiation.

2) Negotiations toward Ceasefire

The Israeli Operation, "Protective Edge," started on July 8 and destroyed vast areas in the Gaza Strip. According to the emergency report of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Palestinian death toll rose to 2,131, of whom 1,473 have been identified as civilians (OCHA 2014). The Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights has compiled a list of 504 children killed in Gaza, comprising almost a quarter of the total Palestinian dead (Marszal 2014). While being criticized by Israel for using civilians as human shields (IDF 2014), Hamas and the other factions' military organizations continued launching rockets at Israel. At the same time, Hamas indirectly offered conditions for truce with Israel from the beginning of the war. The rocket attacks

and truce deal ran alongside each other until the end of the war. The double pressure of violence and proposal can be considered to have composed Hamas's strategy to free Gaza from the seizure.

The first such offer by Hamas, which attracted international attention, was mediated by Al Jazeera television, a Qatar-based satellite network, on July 16. In the proposal announced by Azmi Bishara, former member of Knesset (the Israeli parliament), who is of Palestinian origin, Hamas requested "lifting the siege and opening the border crossings to commerce and people," among nine other conditions. These included "prohibition on Israeli interference in the reconciliation agreement" and "freeing all the prisoners that were arrested after the killing of the three youths" (Glunts 2014). Another demand, jointly submitted by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to the United States, members of the Arab League, and other countries on July 24 also included similar conditions. Among the conditions listed in the document are: the opening of borders and freedom of movement for Gazan residents; and the opening of the Rafah Crossing in coordination with Egypt and the Palestinian Authority (Khoury 2014). These conditions indicate the primary demands of Hamas, representing people in the Gaza Strip which had been under blockade since 2007.

The fact that Qatar and Egypt were both named in the proposal process suggests important relations with those countries for Palestinians. Qatar has served as a political base for Hamas, hosting Khaled Mishal, since the relocation from Syria. It has continued to extend its support, financially and politically under its humanitarian and charitable project requiring "no rewards" (Abū 'Āmir 2013). The combined action of Hamas and Azmi Bishara, former politician in the Israeli parliament, was somewhat surprising, but not a completely odd situation, considering Bishara's Palestinian origins and personal connection with Arab countries.⁵ During the Gaza War of 2014, Bishara was based in Doha, Qatar as General Director of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

⁵ Bishara visited Syria, an enemy of Israel, in 2001 and 2006 without seeking permission from the government. He was accused of supporting a terrorist group, namely Hezbollah, and of making an illegal visit to Syria and Lebanon. He subsequently resigned from the Knesset in 2007.

The appearance of the truce mediator in Al Jazeera and days of meetings held in the political leader's residence in Doha showed Qatar's support for Hamas during the Gaza War. However, Qatar cannot provide military aid to Hamas as it has a US army base within its territory and hopes to sustain its relationship with the US (Abū 'Āmir 2013). This has meant that Qatar missed the most crucial point in its assistance to Hamas. Because of the deterioration of Hamas's relationship with Syria, as its ally in the "Resistance Axis," Iran had already begun decreasing its military support to the Gaza Strip since 2012. So the situation was different from that of the previous Gaza wars, and Hamas and the other military groups could not depend on arms from Iran anymore (Abū 'Āmir 2014). In that sense, Qatar could not substitute for the former allies.

Before the stopping of aid, technology for producing and developing rockets had already been introduced and disseminated to local engineers. This helped subsequent resistance from the Gaza Strip.⁶ Hamas's military wing, the *Izz ad-Dīn al-Qassām* Brigades, carried out attacks using Gaza-produced rockets launched at Israel. Among these, M-75s played a pivotal role as they reached the major cities of Israel, including Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The M-302 (otherwise known as the R-160) has a longer range and threatened even cities as far away as Haifa during the war.

Egypt was another country that featured in the ceasefire negotiation between Israel and Palestine. It played a much bigger role than Qatar in facilitating communication. Because of its historically close ties with Fatah and the Israeli government, Egypt appeared as a "natural mediator in the Gaza Strip." However, it did not play the expected role of an honest broker. According to Yuval Diskin, former director of Israel's internal security service, Shin Bet, "the Egyptians [were] using their importance as a negotiator to humiliate Hamas" (Heyer 2014). Oppressing the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliated organizations, the military government under President Sisi did not offer a proposal of ceasefire as preferred by Hamas. This fruitless mediation delayed the negotiation process.

⁶ Author's interview with 'Azzām Tamīmī, an intellectual familiar with Hamas's politics (November 3, 2014 in London).

For instance, Egypt and Israel thought that the issue of border control in Rafah could be solved only through negotiation with the Fatah government. Also, the issue with the highest priority for Israel was security.⁷ Based on this perception, the first plan for ceasefire was proposed as the Egyptian Initiative on July 15. This was actually the idea of Prime Minister Netanyahu, and was transmitted to Egypt through Tony Blair, the Middle East peace envoy.⁸ The proposal was delivered to Abu-Marzouk. However, Mishal was not informed in advance and rejected it. Hamas spokesperson, Sami Abu Zuhri, even commented: “We in Hamas haven't heard about the Egyptian suggestions except on media outlets. Nobody has consulted us about this initiative, and so it is natural that the initiative isn't binding to us” (Ma'an 2014b). The Hamas official condemned this initiative, saying that if one of the sides involved in the conflict is not consulted, it is “worthless.”

Nevertheless, the final agreement for a ceasefire was reached through mediation by Egypt. This was because of the involvement of Fatah in the agreement. While fighting continued, mainly between Israel and Hamas, the head of the Palestinian negotiating team in Cairo was Azzam al-Ahmad, a leader from Fatah and aide to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority President. Moreover, Abbas himself announced the long-term ceasefire agreement. The agreement between Israel and the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip went into effect at 7 p.m. on August 27. The reason why Hamas accepted Fatah's primary role in the negotiation is not clear, but this framework from the Palestinian side certainly helped persuade the Israeli side to join the talks. It may also suggest the will to continue, and to rebuild the unity government of Palestine after the war.

4. The Aftermath of the Gaza War of 2014

After the fighting ended, Hamas, as a leading organization of resistance toward Israel, gained strong popular support among Palestinians. The opinion poll conducted in the last days and immediate aftermath of the Gaza War showed this (PSR 2014). According to the

⁷ Author's interview with Tamīmī (November 3, 2014 in London).

⁸ Author's interview with Tamīmī (November 3, 2014 in London).

results, 79% of the respondents believed that Hamas has won the Gaza War, and 94% were satisfied with Hamas' military performance in confronting Israeli forces. Influenced by this achievement during the war, for a moment, Hamas also gained political support. In response to the question assuming the coming election, "If new presidential elections are held today and only two [Abbas and Haniyeh] were nominated," for the first time in eight years in the PSR's polls, Haniyeh received the support of the majority of respondents (61%), while Abbas received support from only 32%. This can be called a landslide victory for Hamas in local politics. During the war, the residents of Gaza suffered heavy damages and huge casualties. However, they showed high satisfaction toward Hamas's attack on Israel which incurred retaliation. The reason can be assumed to be based on the history of Gaza; the prolonged occupation and closure may have led to fame being attached to any unflinching resistance from the Palestinian side. Hamas was the only player within the resistance that could play a leading role.

Nevertheless, the situation did not endure. Closure of the Egyptian border continued, even after the Gaza War disturbed the reconstruction in the Gaza Strip. This was not because of dishonest behavior on the part of the Egyptian government. Rather, it was caused by the intermissive attacks on the Egyptian police and army in the northern Sinai Peninsula. The most serious attack was the one that took place on October 25, which killed 31 and injured 30 Egyptian army forces personnel. A huge suicide bomb blast targeted an army checkpoint at the North Sinai Bedouin town of Sheikh Zuweid, which is around 12 kilometers west of the Rafah crossing point (Middle East Eye 2014). Egyptian authorities opened the Rafah Crossing for three days in mid-December, after nearly two months of an ongoing closure, but the closure continued for the rest of the period and resulted in thousands of Palestinians being stuck at the border. The continued siege detracted from the political achievement of Hamas through the Gaza War.

Concerning the unity government, the implementation of reconciliation was a long hard road. The basis of the problems was the long period of discommunication between Fatah and Hamas. Despite calls from different sources in Gaza, and among PLO leaders, neither Abbas nor the current prime minister, Rami Hamdallah, have set foot in the Gaza Strip. Abbas has avoided Gaza for over seven years after an attempt to

assassinate him was uncovered in 2007 (Kuttab 2014). After the war, in mid-September, they re-launched negotiations over the administration of the unity government. They agreed to let the Palestinian Authority take control of matters in the Gaza Strip such as facilitation of the import of materials, payment of salaries to public sector workers, and control of border crossing. These were the problems that Hamas had tried to solve either by joining the unity government or through a ceasefire negotiation with Israel during the Gaza War. The ministers of the Palestinian Authority visited Gaza for the second time in December 2014 and discussed problems in Gaza over the New Year.

Conclusion

The widespread “Arab Spring” provoked only sporadic uprisings of Palestinians due to their specific conditions during the prolonged conflict with Israel. Those movements did not last long and the momentum was rapidly lost. However, they bore some fruit in the long term, as they urged the formation of the unity government between Hamas and Fatah after three years. There was also a greater impact brought about by the Arab Spring on the regional politics surrounding Hamas. Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Qatar are the countries that played a key role in this transformation. The civil war in Syria compelled Hamas’s departure from there, physically and ideologically. As the Assad regime was a strong supporter of Hamas, providing it with a free space of political activity, deterioration of the relationship and loss of a base in geographical proximity to Palestine was a severe blow for Hamas. It also meant a break from the “Resistance Axis,” which comprised a strategic alliance between Hamas, Iran, and Hezbollah. The upheavals in Egypt successively shifted the position of Hamas. After the relatively cooperative Morsi government, the military-supported government led by Sisi had a devastating impact on the Gaza Strip. Its economy was completely damaged by the destruction of the smuggling tunnels, which had supported people’s lives there via the illicit trade conducted through them. Financial crisis and political isolation caused by the Arab Spring compelled Hamas to take a new approach to change the situation.

The first step for change was its collaboration with Fatah in the unity government. National reconciliation had already been reached in May 2011. However, there was no agreement for achieving detailed coordination. In 2014, because of the devastating

economic situation, Hamas was compelled to look for a way to escape from the prolonged sanctions. Joining the unity government was one way of avoiding international sanctions and gaining authority. From the perspective of Fatah, the stalemate of the peace negotiation with Israel propelled them to look for another way of achieving fame among the Palestinian people. The compelling situation, for both Fatah and Hamas, finally led to the formation of the unity government in June 2014.

However, the unexpected recognition and welcoming of the government by the international community caused another development. As a result of the wave of recognition for the unity government, opposing Israel isolated it politically. While it was difficult to resist alteration of the political landscape, another event occurred. Israeli teenager settlers were kidnapped and found dead in the West Bank, and a Palestinian teenager from Jerusalem was murdered in revenge. These events not only fueled popular anger, but also gave both sides an excuse for conducting attacks and searches for their own defense. “Brother’s Keeper” was a massive operation that covered the entire area of the West Bank, leading to the arrest of more than 400 Palestinians. The massive scale of arrests depleted the presence of leaders and practically damaged Hamas. There were also rocket attacks launched from the Gaza Strip that even reached Haifa, the furthest point. Israel retaliated with bombardment, and the exchange of fire led to the Gaza War in the summer of 2014.

In these circumstances, Hamas took its second step to change the situation of its economic and political isolation. This was through indirect bargaining for a truce in the war. In the proposals, Hamas raised conditions, including lifting of the siege, opening the border crossing, and the freedom of Gazans to travel outside. Putting double pressure by violence and proposal can be considered to be a part of Hamas’s strategy to free Gaza from seizure. The presence of a new player, Qatar, partly helped this development. Qatar mediated between Israel and Hamas and helped strengthen the appeal of the proposal, while Hamas kept refusing to negotiate directly with Israel. Qatar’s presence, and its support for Hamas, is unique, with its emir being the first head of state to visit Gaza. This also reflects a change in the political map in the Middle East after the Arab Spring. At the end of the war, Egypt, historically a “natural mediator,” mediated the final agreement of

the ceasefire. The deal included not only Israel and Hamas, but also Fatah representing the Palestinian Authority. The framework seems to emphasize the pro-Fatah stance of Egypt and Israel, but at the same time suggests the will to continue and rebuild the unity government among Palestinians.

Hamas's military performance during the war gave it strong political support just after the war. Despite heavy damages and huge casualties, the residents in Gaza showed high satisfaction regarding Hamas's attack on Israel. This was because of the prolonged occupation and closure which led to fame being attached to any unflagging resistance. However, continued closure and delay of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip again deprived them of authority. The Egyptian border of the Rafah Crossing remained closed because of the attack at the border just after the end of the war. The unity government did not function effectively enough to be able to negotiate the closure with Israel. Longstanding miscommunication between Fatah and Hamas deterred the development of coordination between both sides.

Based on the analysis above, it is clear that this chronological development suggests a link between the Arab Spring and the Gaza War of 2014. The surrounding context for Hamas, especially its change of position in regional politics after the Arab Spring, had already set the environment for the war in 2014. Its political isolation and the economic crisis compelled Hamas to seek a solution, and to choose different types of strategies. Being responsible as a chosen representative of the government, Hamas also needed to sustain popular support, at least within the Gaza Strip. That was its motivation for achieving authority through the unity government, or expanding its attacks against its enemy, Israel. In other words, Hamas, as an Islamic party already in political power, had its own challenges derived from the situation that had existed since the Arab Spring. It tried to overcome those challenges and the outcomes led to the Gaza War in the summer of 2014 as a natural development. The challenging situation is not over yet, and its effects will continue to be felt for the foreseeable future.

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