

COMMENT 259

Pakistan and its affinity for the Hamas

By **Siegfried O. Wolf**

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Dr. Siegfried O. Wolf, Director of Research at SADF (Coordinator: Democracy Research Programme); he was educated at the Institute of Political Science (IPW) and South Asia Institute (SAI), both Heidelberg University. Additionally he is member (affiliated researcher) of the SAI as well as a former research fellow at IPW and Centre de Sciences Humaines (New Delhi, India). Dr Wolf worked as a consultant to NATO-sponsored periodic strategic independent research and assessment of Afghanistan-Pakistan issues.

It is widely [known that](#) state-sponsorship of terrorism is an essential tool in Pakistan’s foreign and domestic policies. The involvement of Islamabad’s security sector agents in terrorist attacks on both [Indian](#) and [Afghan](#) soils are [documented](#). Considering that the country is the base for numerous regional and global Jihadist groups enjoying the good will of the political and military leadership, it does not come by surprise that terrorist groups in other world regions, such as the Hamas in the Middle East, also enjoy the sympathies of many Pakistanis. We thus witness a significant popular opposition to any form of normalization of relations between Islamabad and Tel Aviv. This is one reason why the country does [not recognize the state of Israel](#).

The caretaker Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar and his administration’s apparent [‘careful tone’](#) regarding the terrorist attack by Hamas against Israel and the subsequent Israeli military response can’t distract us from the deeply entrenched anti-Israeli sentiments prevailing among significant sections of Pakistan’s society. Besides expressing concerns about the [‘human cost of escalating situation’](#) and calling for an [‘international intervention’](#), the [‘unusually measured tone’](#) quickly reveals its limitations and one can observe a return to Islamabad’s traditionally anti-Israel and pro-Palestine rhetoric. Concretely, Pakistani politicians blame Tel Aviv for the conflict, express condolences for the casualties of Israel’s counter-terrorism measures, and at the same time ignore the victims and damages of Hamas’ terrorism. Interim Prime Minister Kakar feels [“‘heartbroken’ by the violence’](#) but

also [‘laments the Israeli occupation of the West Bank’](#) and points out [‘\[t\]he two-state solution does not at all mean accepting Israel as a separate state’](#). Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani [adds](#) that ‘[t]here is no change, nor are we contemplating a change in our policy regarding Israel’. In other words, Kakar and Jilani maintain the Pakistani policy of questioning Israel’s statehood. By describing counter-terrorism activities by the Israel Defence Forces as ‘occupation’ of Gaza and ‘oppression’¹ of Palestinians, the Foreign Minister is even challenging the right by the Israeli state and its people for self-defence. The non-acceptance by Islamabad of Israel’s statehood is best [expressed](#) in the words of Senator Mushahid Hussain ‘[t]he first lesson of the Gaza war is that the so-called recognition of Israel debate or discussion in Pakistan has been buried, and rightly so’. Furthermore, the influential politician (who currently serves as the Chair of the Defence Committee of the Senate) [stressed](#) that ‘[i]t [*the recognition of Israel*] was a nonissue, and just because some Arab countries are doing it, there was no need, no requirement for Pakistan to do so, because we have our own perspective on that, which is more long-standing and older than the Arab one’. Here, it is important to [note](#) that Pakistan ‘enjoys multifaceted cooperative relations with all states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)’, but the issue of recognising Israel creates a dilemma for Islamabad. On one side, Pakistan relies on financial support from the GCC states – which clearly creates certain dependencies; on the other side, [‘it has a longstanding position on the Palestine issue’](#) which does not allow supporting the rapprochement between several Arab states and Israel, as envisaged in the 2020 Abraham Peace Accords signed in Washington. However, the latter contributed to an alienation of Pakistan from a large segment of the Muslim world, which changed remarkably during recent years. In 2020, [31 out of 57](#) members of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) recognized Israel, which constitutes an ascending trend. Yet Islamabad remained impervious to these developments, trapped in old patters. As such, one must assume that instead of condemning the atrocities and heinous tactics by Hamas, the Israeli armed response – defamed as disproportional – will serve as a justification for Islamabad to ignore international calls to fundamentally reconsider its hostile approach towards Israel.

¹ Pakistan’s Foreign Minister [Jilani stated on X](#) that ‘Pakistan is deeply concerned by the escalating hostility in the Middle East and the loss of innocent lives. We stand in solidarity with Palestinians and call for an immediate end to the violence and oppression by Israeli occupation forces.’

Interestingly, many of the above-mentioned statements by Pakistani politicians are currently done [in Urdu](#) and published on domestic news platforms². It is obvious that with an expression of pro-Hamas sentiments, the political leadership wants to address radicalized clerics and the far-right sections of the citizenry. Not only has Pakistan's [interim government](#) expressed their sympathy for the faith of Gaza – and subsequently for the Hamas political force chosen by the Palestinians to run the enclave and its affairs. Pakistan's '[Islamic religious leaders](#) in the country have also expressed support for both Palestine and Hamas, while criticizing Israel's policies toward Palestinians.' After the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (JeI) announced a '[Palestine solidarity week](#)' from October 9 to 15, cities like Karachi and Islamabad and other major urban areas witnessed large-scale [pro-Palestine rallies](#) during the last days. According to observers, the JeI's top leadership and other religious leaders³ kept a relative low profile in expressing their anti-Israel sentiments (understood as '[no announcements of "Death to Israel" rallies](#)'). However, second-tier leaders like Liaqat Baloch, the deputy emir of the JeI, did not, proclaiming that '[Israel is a constant threat to international peace and is an ulcer in the chest of the civilized world](#)'. That religious hardliners continue to [agitate against Israel](#) can also be seen in a joint statement by numerous clerics stating that 'Palestinian mujahideen buried Israel's pride into dust. The attacks by the Palestinian mujahideen on Israel are a reaction against the Zionist aggression. The surprise attacks have destroyed the impression of Israel being invincible'. The eulogy of the Hamas and their terrorist activities by Pakistan's clerics underlines the deeply entrenched ideological connection between the Hamas and their ideational roots in the South Asian country. Fabien Baussart, founder and President of the Paris-based think tank Center of Political and Foreign Affairs, [points out](#) that '[t]he ideological fount from which Hamas has sprung is organically linked to Pakistan and its jihadist orientation. The Muslim Brotherhood from which Hamas has remerged and the Jamaat Islami which is the mother organization of jihadism in Pakistan, are two sides of the same coin. This ideological link and affinity are one of the bases of the burgeoning relationship between the Pakistani state and the Hamas para-state.'

² Namely, in the Urdu daily Roznama Jang ('Daily War'), quoted by [MEMRI](#).

³ For example, cleric and politician Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, head of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F), the leading Islamist political party in the country and part of the former ruling coalition of then Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, '[asked the Palestinians to respect the human rights of Israelis](#).'

We thus see that elements in Pakistan prefer to stand with Hamas, the perpetrators of terrorism, and not with its victims - Israel and the people living on its soil. Those Pakistani do not realize that terrorist organisations like Hamas do not represent the cause of the Palestinians. In the Gaza Strip, Hamas might be interested in their own partisan interests, such as achieving and maintaining power, as well as securing international funding through spreading Jihadism and creating instability within and beyond the region. But this is only a part of their story. We must understand that Hamas is part of a much larger phenomenon, the struggle for a global Jihad as envisaged by the Muslim Brotherhood and like-minded organizations.

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19 Avenue des Arts 2nd floor, 1210 Brussels, Belgium
E 0833.606.320 RPM Bruxelles
Email: info@sadf.eu Web: www.sadf.eu