

# The Development of Dialogue, Reconciliation and Putting the Palestinian House in Order 2008–2017



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Excerpts from

The Palestinian Strategic Report and The Palestine Daily Chronicle

Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

**The Development of Dialogue,  
Reconciliation and  
Putting the Palestinian House in  
Order**

**2008–2017**

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## **Introduction**

Al Zaytouna Centre publishes the following dossier on developments related to Palestinian domestic dialogue and reconciliation, commonly referred to as Putting the Palestinian House in Order, during the period 2008–2017.

The dossier is published in the context of recent developments in the reconciliation file that culminated in the signing of the Cairo Agreement on 12/10/2017. The Cairo Agreement opened the way for the government in Ramallah headed by Rami al-Hamdallah to manage the ministries, institutions and crossings in the Gaza Strip. In turn, this paved the way for the implementation of the remainder of the items of the reconciliation agreement signed in May 2011.

This dossier relies on material from the Palestinian Strategic Report issued by al-Zaytouna Centre. It covers the period 2008–2015 and was co-edited by Mu'min Bsiso, Majid Abu Diak and Mohsen Mohammad Saleh. Analysis for the period 2016–2017 relies on The Palestine Daily Chronicle issued by the al-Zaytouna Centre, co-edited by Rabi' al-Danan and Basem Elkassem. In both cases, the supervision and editing was by Mohsen Mohammad Saleh.

The dossier discusses the background and circumstances in which the Palestinian division took place, and explains the impact of internal, Arab and international developments over the past decade.

The Editor

## **The Developments of 2008**

The dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, and the placing of the Palestinian house in order had been a hotly debated issue during most of the year 2008. But what appeared to be “quarrelsome partners” failed to confront each other on one table to resolve their differences. Mutual accusations, lack of trust and preconditions dominated throughout the year. Of course, the issue was not a mere “quarrel”, but a profound difference around the political program and the strategic goals.

Both of the conflicting parties, Fatah and Hamas, appeared to have believed that time would prove to be a healer, or on their part against the other side, though time often complicates matters and leads to realities on the ground that make resolution of a problem more difficult. The Palestinian presidency and the Authority betted on the following:

1. The suffocating siege and the possibility of an Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip (GS).
2. The operations of suppression and eradication in the West Bank (WB).
3. The waning of the resistance.
4. Security chaos, strikes, and riots.
5. The official Arab and international deadlock.

They expected these developments to lead to the failure and collapse of Hamas government, hence the presidency and Fatah would impose their conditions on the movement and its government.

But Hamas and the supporters of Haniyyah’s government had, on the other side, betted on the following:

1. The willingness and ability to continue the steadfastness.
2. The organizational discipline of Hamas versus the flabbiness, organizational disintegration, and corruption of Fatah.
3. The stumbling of the settlement process and the improbability of an eventual solution acceptable to the Palestinian people.
4. The popular democratic legitimacy, and the probability of the resumption of the role of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) as a result of a prisoners’ exchange deal, which would facilitate the downfall of Fayyad’s government by democratic means.
5. The imminent end of ‘Abbas’ presidency, while the PLC will continue to function.
6. The failure of the American project and its stumbleness in the region.
7. The acceleration of the Arab-Muslim support to the besieged Strip.

Hence, the two parties have been engaged in a joint operation of “finger biting”, awaiting the cry of one before the other. But this would exhaust the Palestinians and delay their national project, and give ammunition to those fishing in troubled waters to distort the image of the Palestinian cause and struggle due to the schism.

President ‘Abbas conditions for initiating a dialogue with Hamas may be summarized as follow:

1. Retraction from the coup in GS and apologizing to the Palestinian people.
2. To recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and undertake to recognize the agreements that the PLO had signed and the legitimacies that it accepted.

Meanwhile President ‘Abbas viewed the basis of an agreement with Hamas as follows:

1. To strike an agreement that would not isolate the leadership or the Palestinian government, or restore the siege on the Palestinian people.
2. To conduct an early presidential and legislative elections.

While refusing bilateral dialogue with Hamas, the presidential trend preferred to give itself a wider legitimacy and a propaganda stunt through sending a PLO delegation to dialogue with Hamas, or to conduct the dialogue session in the presence of representatives of all the Palestinian factions. But Hamas maintained that the core of the problem is between Fatah and Hamas, hence they should dialogue directly to resolve the basic issues, and subsequently extend the forum of the negotiations.

Hamas insisted that there should be no preconditions for the dialogue and that all issues should be put on the negotiation table. However, for the sake of having a fruitful dialogue, Hamas felt that all the standing issues be discussed in one bloc, and all political prisoners be released. Just before the assembly of the Cairo dialogue conference, scheduled in November 2008, Hamas elevated the latest condition of releasing the detainees into a pre-condition, hence was its decision not to attend and the consequential postponement of the dialogue session. This infuriated Fatah which came to the dialogue without a prior insistence on the above listed conditions.

Hamas did not view what it did in GS as a coup against the legitimacy, but a necessary step to confront those who exploited the security chaos to suppress the real legitimacy that was elected by the Palestinian people. In the words of Khalid Mish'al, "We are the legitimacy. How come that we rise against ourselves."<sup>1</sup> Hamas had no objection to the proposal of forming a credible and impartial committee to determine the responsible side and who should apologize.<sup>2</sup> But it rejected to recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people before its reform and activation, and only after Hamas joins its institutions. Hamas also declared that it would not be bound by the agreements concluded by the PLO, particularly those that contradict the Palestinian fundamentals and the resistance course, specifically recognition of Israel and its right in the 1948 occupied lands, or any other permanent deals. With these conditions, the dialogue was practically not feasible.

For those who called for retraction from "the coup" and the return of the status quo ante 14/6/2007, this inherently meant the acceptance of President 'Abbas' legitimacy, and to surrender to him power as well as the civil and security headquarters in GS; besides the reactivation of the official security services and the punishment of the architects of "the coup". But these quarters did not entertain Hamas' interpretation that the return of the status quo meant the re-establishment of the national government under Haniyyah's premiership, retraction of all the decrees and laws issued by 'Abbas in the absence of the PLC, the resumption of normal duties by all of Hamas' institutions and societies in the WB and the stoppage of security coordination with Israel as well as the Dayton plan that strove to restructure the security forces and destroy the infrastructure of the resistance movements.

Meanwhile, no serious measures were taken during the year 2008 to build bridges between the two sides in preparation for a meaningful dialogue. On the contrary, mutual accusations and hostile media campaigns continued, hence an uncondusive environment of mistrust prevailed. However, this does not negate the fact that some genuine attempts were made by both parties and at all levels to bypass the crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> Site of The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 15/1/2008, <http://www.palestine-info.info/ar>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

President ‘Abbas and some of Fatah leaders accused Hamas of being a satellite of Iran in the region, of having contacts with al-Qa‘idah, and of harboring plans to establish “a reactionary emirate” in GS. On its part, Hamas accused ‘Abbas and Ramallah’s government of implementing the American-Israeli agenda, and of suppressing the resistance drive. Moreover, the Hamas maintained that the leadership in Ramallah was reluctant to pursue the dialogue because of the American veto against any reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas.

President ‘Abbas appeared to be contradictory in his speeches and addresses. For he drifted between a call to open a new page and engage in dialogue and a bitter, violent, and sarcastic criticism of the other party. His speech on the 43rd anniversary of Fatah called for “opening a new page” and a “cordial brotherly understanding,” but at the same time accused the resistance of doing nothing but “inflicting misery on GS and its patient people.” He added, “It is very well known that when subjected to direct danger, the pretenders of resistance call for a disgraceful truce to protect their lives and privileges.”<sup>3</sup> However, ‘Abbas probably knows that speaking of a disgraceful truce and the protection of lives and privileges was futile and would seriously backlash on the leadership in Ramallah, particularly so as Hamas consider the Authority in Ramallah to be more fragile in this respect.

In an interview with *Al-Hayat* newspaper, published on 27/2/2008, Abu Mazin bluntly described the resistance rockets as “futile”, and added, “The activities of Hamas revealed to the world that it is, to say the least, a reactionary movement that strives to establish an emirate in GS, but does not care a bit for the rest of the national project which has become under imminent danger because of what it did.” He continued to claim, al-Qa‘ida is in GS and it is an ally of Hamas, and that he will not allow “duality in armament [in the WB].... The claim that this armament belongs to the resistance is a flagrant lie that nobody entertains.”<sup>4</sup>

In the fourth anniversary of the demise of Yasir ‘Arafat, ‘Abbas held Hamas squarely responsible for the “delay of the Palestinian dialogue in the service of some regional agenda.”

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<sup>3</sup> *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 1/1/2008.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 27/2/2008.



While the Authority in Ramallah pays the salaries of 77 thousand officials in GS, he continued to say, the others “deal in money, arms and drugs”!!<sup>5</sup> This accusation of engaging in drugs is a strange and cheap charge that President ‘Abbas himself knows its falsity.

Some of Fatah leaders, like ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, Abdullah al-Efrangi and Qaddoura Faris, admitted that there is an American veto against any dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, but they argued that their movement is not bound by this veto, and would opt for dialogue whenever it feels that this is in the national interest.<sup>6</sup> ‘Abbas repeatedly denied his submission to such a veto, saying, “We will not accept any veto, be it regional, international, or local, that becomes a stumbling block in the way of national reconciliation.”<sup>7</sup>

Some of Hamas’ leaders, like Muhammad Nazzal, Fawzi Barhoum, ‘Izzat al-Rishq, Khalid Mish‘al, Isma‘il Radwan and Mahmud Zahhar, considered the American veto a formidable obstacle in the way of reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> Hamas saw in the speech of ‘Amr Mussa in the conference of donor nations, held in Berlin on 24/6/2008, an evidence for this conviction. For Mussa had said that the international community should be up to its responsibility to lift what he called the veto on national reconciliation. In fact, Mussa was engaged in a heated debate on the issue with Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary of State, who responded by saying that it is not possible “to achieve peace without having a peace partner.”<sup>9</sup>

In a memo, dated 6/1/2008, Hamas presented its vision to resolve the Palestinian schism, which emphasized that it harms national, Arab, and Muslim interests, serves no side but the Israeli, and weaken the Palestinian political stand and the ability of any Palestinian leadership to restore the Palestinian rights. The memorandum added that the solution lies in an unconditional and transparent dialogue that addresses the core issues and distance itself

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<sup>5</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 12/11/2008.

<sup>6</sup> See the statement of ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 20/9/2008; and site of Arabs 48, 23/8/2008, [www.arabs48.com](http://www.arabs48.com); and *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 5/11/2008; and the statement of al-Efrangi, *al-Khaleej* newspaper, Sharjah, 6/11/2008; and the statement of Qaddura Faris, Quds Press International News Agency, London, 29/9/2008.

<sup>7</sup> *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah* newspaper, Ramallah, 1/8/2008; and see *Albayan* newspaper, Dubai, 12 and 24/11/2008.

<sup>8</sup> See the statements: Muhammad Nazzal, site of Aljazeera.net, 27/4/2008; and Fawzi Barhum, *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper, London, 6/7/2008; and ‘Izzat al-Rishq, PIC, 6/7/2008; and Khalid Mish‘al, *Annahar* newspaper, Beirut, 16/7/2008; and Sa‘id Siyam, *al-Khaleej*, 27/10/2008.

<sup>9</sup> Aljazeera.net, 25/6/2008.

from foreign intervention, and which should be preceded by the stoppage of the smear media campaigns and the release of the detainees. Hamas specified ten basic fundamentals for the dialogue, including unity of the WB and GS and their political systems, respect for the option of democracy, all the components of the Palestinian legitimacy and respect for the basic law, the establishment of a government of national reconciliation, adherence to the Cairo and Mecca Agreements of 2005 and 2007 respectively, abiding by the right of Palestinian people to the resistance of occupation and the restructuring and reactivation of the PLO. Hamas maintained that the PA, irrespective of who controls it, is not able or qualified to administer the resistance project. Hence, it is wrong to associate the resistance, its factions, and armament with the Authority, which, consequently, should not monopolize the arms or disarm the resistance. Moreover, there should be coordination between the resistance factions to administer the conflict with Israel, and with the government of the Palestinian Authority (PA) through a suitable mechanism.

Muhammad Nazzal, Member of Hamas Political Bureau, revealed that Khalid Mish'al presented to the Saudi leadership a memo of six principles that was along the lines of the above memorandum.<sup>10</sup> The call for dialogue was once more renewed when the Palestinians were compelled to lift the siege along Rafah passage, and hundreds of thousands of them crossed the Egyptian frontier. The dismissed government had then suggested joint administration of the Rafah passage with Ramallah, but the latter refused. Nimr Hammad, President 'Abbas' Political Adviser, said in this respect, the presidency will not debate with Hamas any issue unless and until "it retracts from its coup," and Hamas should "immediately depart from the passage and declare its failure to manage the affairs of the Gazzan people."<sup>11</sup> Some observers felt that these declarations had revealed the desire of the Authority in Ramallah that the siege continues to secure the failure of Hamas government through a popular uprising masterminded by the one million and a half or so Gazzans in protest of the tremendous hardship that they suffered as a result of this suffocating embargo.

Under the pressure of the above emergency that led to the infiltration of hundreds of thousands of the Gazzan inhabitants into Egyptian territory, President Mubarak offered to

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<sup>10</sup> *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper, London, 5/1/2008.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Ahram* newspaper, Cairo, 24/1/2008; and *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 24/1/2008.

host a dialogue between Fatah and Hamas to end the fiasco,<sup>12</sup> which was initially welcomed by both movements.<sup>13</sup> But President ‘Abbas insisted on his preconditions,<sup>14</sup> and consequently the meeting did not take place. Ramadan Shallah, the Secretary-General of The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ), opined that the Authority in Ramallah constitutes the major obstacle for the dialogue, and that Abu Mazin had on each occasion insisted on a condition that he knew very well and beforehand that it will be rejected by Hamas.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Yemeni Initiative**

‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh, the Yemeni president, presented on 9/8/2007 a six-point initiative to resolve the Palestinian conflict, which was welcomed by Hamas but declined by President ‘Abbas.

However, after a visit by President ‘Abbas to Yemen on 9/2/2009, he added to the Yemeni initiative a new condition that he insisted to be the most important prerequisite for a dialogue. It became the first item of the revised version and read as follows: “The return in GS to the status quo ante 13/6/2007, to abide by the obligations of the PLO and to conduct early presidential and legislative elections.” The six other items were:

Second: Resumption of dialogue on the basis of the Cairo and Mecca Agreements, respectively of 2005 and 2007, on the basis that the Palestinian people constitute a united and indivisible block, that the PA is composed of the elected presidency and parliament, and an executive authority represented by a national unity government, and that the Palestinian legitimacy with all its components be adhered to.

Third: Absolute respect by all parties to the Palestinian constitution and law.

Fourth: Restructuring of the security forces on national basis, whereby they should be under the top authority and the government of national unity, and no faction should have any authority on them.

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<sup>12</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 26/1/2008.

<sup>13</sup> *Al-Watan* newspaper, Abha (Saudi Arabia), 26/1/2008.

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 27/1/2008.

<sup>15</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 28/1/2008.

Fifth: To form a coalition government of national unity where each faction should be represented according to its weight in the Legislative Council, which would be able to exercise all its responsibilities.

Sixth: The formation a committee from the Arab League composed of relevant states like Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Syria, and Jordan, to execute the above item. Yemen declared its readiness to join this committee if invited.

Seventh: All the Palestinian institutions would be formed without any factional prejudice or preference, and they should submit to the top authority and the government of national unity.

We the representatives of Fatah and Hamas agree that the Yemeni initiative be the framework for a dialogue between the two movements to return to the status quo ante GS incidents, in emphasis of the unity of the Palestinian land, people, and authority.

President ‘Abbas hastily welcomed the revised Yemeni initiative, while Hamas asked for explanations around the added item, and refused the logic of preconditions, though it agreed to include all the items of the initiative in the agenda of the national dialogue for further explanation and discussion. On the basis of the Yemeni invitation, Hamas sent a delegation to Sana‘a, while President ‘Abbas sent a PLO, not an exclusively Fatah, delegation. Hamas viewed this as lack of serious commitment on the part of Abu Mazin because, in its judgment, the PLO delegation speaks neither on behalf of Fatah nor the other Palestinian factions. It was evident during the four-day dialogue (19-23/3/2008) that the core difference was around the first item of the revised initiative, from which, after a long debate, the following statement was finally deleted, viz “to abide by the obligations of the PLO.”

How to deal with the initiative was yet another source for discussion, where Hamas saw that it was a framework for the dialogue rather than for the implementation. Finally, the two sides agreed to issue, separately from the Yemeni initiative, “Sana‘a declaration” of 23/3/2008, which was signed by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and Musa Abu Marzuq, on behalf of Fatah and Hamas respectively. The declaration recorded that both Fatah and Hamas agreed that the initiative be “a framework for the resumption of dialogue between the two movements to return to the status quo ante GS incidents, in emphasis of the unity of the Palestinian land, people, and authority.”

The representatives of Fatah and Hamas were evidently exposed to extreme pressure by the Yemeni leadership to reach an understanding, which the Yemeni president aspired to take to the Arab summit scheduled in Damascus a few days later.

On its propagation, Sana'a declaration and 'Azzam al-Ahmad were brutally criticized by the advisors of President 'Abbas, and a bitter controversy erupted between al-Ahmad and Yasir 'Abd Rabbuh. Nimr Hammad claimed that al-Ahmad did not contact the presidency before signing the declaration,<sup>16</sup> while 'Abd Rabbuh dismissed the declaration as a deceptive dead agreement, and that the initiation of dialogue on its basis is "politically futile".<sup>17</sup> Al-Ahmad responded by insisting that he was in contact with the presidency which authorized him to sign on behalf of Fatah. He accused Hammad of all around ignorance, whereby he does not know his (i.e. al-Ahmad) status in Fatah, not even that he was a member of the movement.<sup>18</sup> However, President 'Abbas supported the position of his advisors, refused to consider the initiative as a framework for the dialogue and insisted on its implementation.<sup>19</sup> However, a few days later, al-Ahmad retracted by declaring that "the initiative was verbatimly agreed to, that it does not allow any explanation or interpretation, and that the purpose of dialogue is its implementation, which should start immediately after the declaration of the end of the coup in Gaza," emphasizing that it is not subject to dialogue but for implementation on the ground.<sup>20</sup> He added, "There would be no dialogue before Haniyyah departs to his house."<sup>21</sup>

The stumbling of the Yemeni initiative and Sana'a declaration demonstrated that the environment was not yet conducive for a Palestinian reconciliation; and that the insistence on preconditions robbed its emotive force and "broke its oars". Moreover, it became clear that some betted on the weakness of the other side to score points at its expense. However, the heated controversy whether the Yemeni initiative was for debate or implementation continued for the rest of the year 2008.

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<sup>16</sup> Aljazeera.net, 24/3/2008.

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 25/3/2008.

<sup>18</sup> Aljazeera.net, 24/3/2008; and *Asharq Alawsat*, 25/3/2008.

<sup>19</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 24/3/2008.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 30/3/2008.

<sup>21</sup> *Alarab* newspaper, Doha, 4/4/2008.

The tense atmosphere between Fatah and Hamas prevailed. In response to Mish'al invitation to 'Abbas to visit GS, the latter renewed his demand that Hamas "retreat from its coup, declare its adherence to the Palestinian-Arab-international legitimacy, and that they go together for an early election."<sup>22</sup> 'Azzam al-Ahmad commented on this development by saying that Mish'al "is not qualified to make such a demand," and that GS is in a state of "rebellion," i.e. it is a "rebellious" province.<sup>23</sup>

### **Egyptian Custodianship**

On 7/4/2008, Usama Hamdan declared that Hamas had officially requested Algeria to mediate for a Palestinian reconciliation, and that the latter positively responded.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, Mahmud al-Zahhar spoke on 29/5/2008 of Qatari attempts of mediation between Mahmud 'Abbas and the dismissed government in GS.<sup>25</sup> But these efforts were apparently unsuccessful.

In his capacity as the president of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), the Senegalese President Abdullah Wad had also tried to activate the reconciliation process. During the first week of June 2008, two delegations, representing Hamas and Fatah, arrived at the Senegalese capital. Each of them met the President and his aides, and the two delegates met together under the patronage of the President. But the differences between them were too deep to be bridged, and the final communiqué declared the failure of the dialogue. The Senegalese felt that Fatah was not sufficiently serious, its delegation did not have the necessary authorization, and that the whole move was more of a gesture to Senegal than a desire to give it an effective role in the reconciliation process. Apparently, President 'Abbas was keen to initiate a new call for dialogue in which Egypt would hopefully play a major role in its success, particularly so as he knew that the Egyptian regime supports Fatah's political orientation and that Egypt had a heavy weight on the Palestinian and Arab fronts. During a meeting with the Executive Committee of the PLO, which was attended by representatives of the Palestinian factions, he had

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<sup>22</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 1/4/2008.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Addustour*, 8/4/2008.

<sup>25</sup> *Alghad*, 30/5/2008.

actually renewed in 5/6/2008, in an unusually conciliatory and accommodative language, the call for dialogue. He even formed a follow up committee composed of Hikmat Zaid, Nimr Hammad and Ahmad ‘Abd al-Rahman from Fatah, ‘Abd al-Rahim Mallouh from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Mahmud Isma‘il from the Arab Liberation Front (ALF) and Mustafa al-Barghuthi, representing the independents.

Shortly afterwards, President ‘Abbas asked President Husni Mubarak for Egypt to patronize, host and work for the success of the Palestinian dialogue. Quoting Nabil ‘Amr, the Palestinian Ambassador in Egypt, *Al-Hayat* newspaper reported that Mubarak informed ‘Abbas of Egypt’s consent and willingness.<sup>26</sup> Hamas welcomed both the dialogue and the manner in which President ‘Abbas proposed it, though it did not notice any change in his previous conditions. It added that it had not then received any invitation, and cautioned that for the dialogue to take a serious path it should be between Fatah and Hamas.<sup>27</sup>

However, President ‘Abbas’ call for dialogue did not materialize either because it was not enthusiastically supported in “Ramallah camp” or it was just a tactical move to caution the Israelis of the extensive disillusionment resulting from the stumbling of the settlement path, and of Hamas’ continued control of GS. Another possible reason for the dragging of the dialogue was ‘Abbas’ fury because of a message that Khalid Mish‘al sent on 8/6/2008 to the Secretary-General of the Arab League and a number of Arab leaders in which he welcomed the dialogue but blamed “the American and the Israeli vetoes” for the formidable difficulties that it confronted, and called for a genuine dialogue, otherwise the reconciliation would be for “other agenda such as being a cover up for expected treaties... or a diplomatic move preceding a harbored incursion or total aggression on GS.”<sup>28</sup>

The Egyptian call for a dialogue continued to be on the air throughout the summer of 2008, and some of Hamas leaders related ‘Abbas’ waning enthusiasm for the subject to the American pressure and the conditions of the Quartet. But Nabil ‘Amr claimed on

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<sup>26</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 10/6/2008.

<sup>27</sup> See for example: Sami Abu Zuhri statement, PIC, 8/6/2008; and Muhammad Nazzal statement, Quds Press, 11/6/2008.

<sup>28</sup> Nabil ‘Amr reported to say that Mahmud ‘Abbas did not intentionally meet Khalid Mish‘al during the former visit to Damascus because of Mish‘al’s “provoking” letter to some Arab leaders. See *Al-Hayat*, 10/7/2008; and see a comment of ‘Abbas in the same sense in: *Al-Hayat*, 30/7/2008.

4/7/2008 that Egypt will soon invite 14 Palestinian factions to conduct the dialogue. Simultaneously, *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper published on 7/7/2008 a paper embodying Hamas' vision on the principles of the dialogue and reconciliation, which were similar to the ones mentioned above. The slowness in Egypt call for dialogue seemed to have partly been motivated by its keenness to make good preparations for the event. In an attempt to reach to a prior common ground, the Egyptian government sent exploratory questions to all the factions,<sup>29</sup> with a preliminary working paper to be the basis for investigation and discussions. On the other hand, the finger-pointing between Fatah and Hamas, Hamas' control of the security square of the Hillis' family and its decisive action against the strike of the teachers and doctors, the continuation of political detention by Ramallah Authority of Hamas and PIJ supporters along with resistance activists, and the claim of some of 'Abbas' senior aides that GS was nothing but a rebellious province..., had all contributed to the stumbling of the dialogue path.

The other Palestinian factions, particularly those under the umbrella of the PLO had also tried to give their vision of ending the Palestinian schism. On 21/7/2008, Saleh Zaidan, a Member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) Political Bureau, maintained that some respected organizational personalities prepared a memorandum that aimed at the launching of a national dialogue to end the conflict between Fatah and Hamas.<sup>30</sup> About a month and half later, some top leaders of the PLO spoke of a drive by the organization's factions to form a "caretaker government" to end the fiasco of the two governments in the Strip and the WB, and that the PFLP and DFLP as well as the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), the Palestinian Democratic Union (Fida) and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) support this orientation. But the PLO top leadership itself felt that Fatah's influence over the government was extremely limited because of the European and American support to Salam Fayyad, and their linkage of the financial aid to the continuation of his personal premiership, besides the fact that Fayyad was not a member of Fatah, and thus not obliged to submit to its decisions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See *al-Khaleej*, and *al-Sharq* newspaper, Doha, 10/8/2008. Hamas has sent its responses to the Egyptian questions according to the broad outlines that had been published by *Asharq Alawsat* on 7/7/2008.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 22/7/2008.

<sup>31</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 7/9/2008.



By the end of September 2008, it was reported that Cairo prepared a document of five themes to be presented to the Palestinian dialogue. Four of them were reportedly almost unanimously endorsed, viz discard of violence, formation of a national consensus government, rehabilitation of the security forces, and restructuring of the PLO, while the fifth spoke of fixing a date for presidential and legislative elections.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the Egyptian proposal had embodied fourteen measures to restore confidence between Fatah and Hamas, such as the stoppage of provocative campaigns, release of the prisoners, and the uplifting of the embargo on the societies and institutions. It also included some other broadly agreed clauses such as those related to the reformation of the PLO and the formation of a transitional government. However, other issues were still a source of difference, e.g., the deployment in GS of Arab forces under Egyptian leadership and the abidance of all the factions by the international agreements concluded by the PLO and the PA.<sup>33</sup> On 8/10/2008, a Hamas delegation arrived at Egypt and had meetings with ‘Omar Suleiman and his aides, in which it was consensually agreed to the formation of a government of national consensus, restructuring of the security forces on national and professional bases, and the formation of a committee to rebuild the PLO within two months from the launching of the national dialogue. Moreover, all the issues should be agreed upon as one package and Cairo should patronize a bilateral dialogue between Fatah and Hamas (scheduled by Egypt on 25/10/2008) before the comprehensive national dialogue commences in 9-11/11/2008.

Hamas made some observations of the Egyptian paper, in which it emphasized the necessity of separation between the requirement of the reconciliation and the end of the schism, and between the topics related to the administration of the conflict and the negotiations with the occupation, besides the importance of the simultaneous implementation of the agreement in the WB and GS, and the resolution of all the issues in one package.

The overwhelming majority of Fatah was for the success of the dialogue, but it also aspired for the formation of a consensus government capable of lifting the siege and to

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<sup>32</sup> *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah, 30/9/2008.

<sup>33</sup> *Okaz*, 6/10/2008.

deal with the international community. Besides, the establishment of ‘Abbas’ legitimacy and the conduct of early presidential and legislative elections.<sup>34</sup>

By late October 2008, tension was resumed, whereby Fatah excused itself from attending the proposed meeting scheduled on 25/10/2008, while Hamas accused the Authority in Ramallah of detaining during the month of October 170 of its members.<sup>35</sup> With great dissatisfaction, Hamas took note of Egypt’s failure to include in its paper any of the movement's proposals. It increasingly felt that the ongoing arrangements would not lead to a viable reconciliation but would concentrate on the needs of one side at the expense of the other, and that the whole exercise would focus on providing a cover to extend ‘Abbas’ presidency. Hence, in its meeting of 4/11/2008 with ‘Omar Suleiman, Hamas expressed serious concern that the campaign of arrest in the WB would poison the environment, and it asked for concrete measures to release all political detainees and guarantee the participation of Hamas’ delegation from the WB. The Egyptian promised to mediate on the issue. Hamas resubmitted its observations on the Egyptian paper, and the Egyptians promised to present a new paper in the meeting of the comprehensive dialogue. However, the Egyptians informed Hamas that President ‘Abbas would be seated during the opening session of 10/11/2008 on the platform beside ‘Omar Suleiman, the Secretary-General of the Arab League and the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and KSA, and that he will leave the hall with them after they deliver their speeches. By then, the leaders of the rest of the factions would ascend to the stage to sign what they presumably had agreed upon the day before the opening session, namely the formation of the committees and their functions and the final communiqué.

The denial of the Authority of the existence of political detainees<sup>36</sup> provoked Hamas’ anger, and according to Muhammad Nazzal, the movement reacted to this development by submitting a list of 500 of its cadre and supporters detained in jails in the WB.<sup>37</sup> Hamas’ requests of equal treatment by the patron with the conflicting parties, and that

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<sup>34</sup> See for example: Qaddura Faris statement, Quds Press, 12/10/2008; and Mahmud ‘Abbas statement, *al-Khaleej*, 21/10/2008.

<sup>35</sup> See Sami Abu Zuhri statement, *al-Khaleej*, 29/10/2008; and ‘Izzat al-Rishq statement, *Arabs* 48, 3/11/2008.

<sup>36</sup> See Nabil Sha‘th Statement, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/11/2008; and Mahmud ‘Abbas statement, *Asharq Alawsat*, 8/11/2008.

<sup>37</sup> *Alghad*, 9/11/2208.

‘Abbas attends all the dialogue sessions, by virtue of his position as the president of Fatah and a key partner of the conflict and not as the patron for the conference, were also turned down. Hence, Hamas, supported by three of the resistance factions, PIJ, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command (PFLP–GC) and al-Sa‘iqa, declined to attend Cairo meeting, and officially handed this decision to the Egyptian side on 8/11/2008.<sup>38</sup> This provoked the detestation and anger of both the Egyptian and Fatah and Authority leadership in Ramallah and some of Fatah leaders accused Hamas of aborting the dialogue and of being associated with some regional agenda.<sup>39</sup> On its part, Hamas responded by saying that those who speak of regional intervention do so to cover the association of their own decisions with agreements with Israel and the American administration.<sup>40</sup> Hamas conditioned its immediate attendance of a dialogue with the release of the detainees, the arrival at Cairo of its delegation from the WB and the participation of ‘Abbas in all the sessions.<sup>41</sup> Besides, the dialogue should be serious and not a ceremonial session of signature.<sup>42</sup> The Israelis read the Egyptian anger as lifting of the Arab cover from Hamas and its government, and felt that the time was opportune for an immediate and extensive aggression on GS.

The Palestinian factions within the PLO criticized Hamas’ boycott of the dialogue sessions. A declaration issued by the Palestinian Leftist Front, composed of the PFLP, DFLP and the PPP, maintained that the launching of the dialogue was feasible on the fixed time, where all issues could be placed on the negotiation table. However, concurrently, the Leftist Front refused political detention and suppression of all freedoms in the WB and the Strip.<sup>43</sup> Rabah Mhana, Member of PFLP Political Bureau, used the word “wrong” in his description of the boycott decision.<sup>44</sup> Hence, the Popular Front used mild and diplomatic language in its criticism of Hamas boycott. While the DFLP held Hamas, in the words of a member of its political bureau, Taysir Khalid, “squarely responsible for the abortion of the efforts of the Egyptian leadership to end the status of

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<sup>38</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 9/11/2008.

<sup>39</sup> See ‘Azzam al-Ahmad statement, *Okaz*, 9/11/2008; and Mahmud ‘Abbas address on the anniversary of ‘Arafat demise, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 12/11/2008.

<sup>40</sup> See the statement of Musa Abu-Marzuq, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 11/11/2008.

<sup>41</sup> See the statement of Khalil Al-Hayyah, *Felesteen* newspaper, 12/11/2008.

<sup>42</sup> See Khalid Mish‘al statement, *Al-Hayat*, 24/11/2008.

<sup>43</sup> *Alquds* newspaper, 22/7/2008.

<sup>44</sup> *Alghad*, 9/11/2008.

schism”; Khalid had even maintained that by these unconvincing pretexts, Hamas intended to hide its real position towards the dialogue, and added that Hamas who accused others of submitting to the external veto against the dialogue had itself surrendered to this veto. By this stand, Khalid concluded, “it opted for narrow partisan interests at the expense of the supreme Palestinian national interests.”<sup>45</sup>

In a joint communiqué, the Palestinian Arab Front, the Palestinian Liberation Front, the People's Struggle Front, Fida and ALF, held Hamas responsible for the delay of the national dialogue and demanded that it reconsiders its decision. The communiqué rejected political detention, but added that it should not be used as a pretext to delay the dialogue.<sup>46</sup>

Obviously, Hamas’ repeated rationale for not attending the dialogue, namely political detention, was not sufficiently convincing. The movement seemed not willing to reveal its strong feeling, shared by other factions, that the dialogue, as structured, was a “political trap” that primarily aimed at legitimizing an extension to ‘Abbas’ presidency, while delaying or postponing the other pressing and urgent issues, for which no guarantees were given that they be discussed and settled in the conference itself.

On the failure of the Cairo national dialogue, the relations between Fatah and Hamas on one side and Ramallah and GS on the other went back to square one; while the sensitivity of the internal situation sharply increased with the imminent end of both ‘Abbas’ presidency, as viewed by Hamas and its supporters, especially with the imminent end of the ceasefire (*tahdi’ah*) period between the resistance and Israeli in GS. But the Israeli aggression on GS that started on 27/12/2008 represented a major turning point, as there were then calls within Fatah and across all the national parties that the differences should be sidelined in order to confront the enemy.<sup>47</sup> Though some had initially betted on the collapse of Hamas’ rule in GS as a result of the Israeli aggression, the heroic steadfastness of the people and the resistance coupled with the support that they had from the Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, and international public impelled them to reconsider their position, and to realize that it would not be possible to control GS through the Israeli

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<sup>45</sup> *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 10/11/2008.

<sup>46</sup> *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 12/11/2008.

<sup>47</sup> See for example: the statement of Ahmad ‘Abd al-Rahman, *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 28/12/2008.

tank. Meanwhile, Hamas felt that the time was not opportune to declare the end of 'Abbas' presidential term, and to temporarily appoint the president, or his deputy, of the PLC in the presumably vacant presidential position. Thus, the widespread support that Hamas got in the GS battle, the new drive that the resistance program earned, the failure of the settlement path, the end of the presidency of Bush and the premiership of Olmert, and the need for a consensus on the reconstruction of GS had all contributed in paving the way for a new and serious national dialogue which culminated in the Cairo meetings of national dialogue during March 2009.

## **The Developments of 2009**

The prospects of dialogue and the efforts to achieve reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas in 2009 were not by any means better than those in 2008. For there had been within Palestine two conflicting visions and paths to deal with the priorities and fundamentals of the national project, for the way to administer the conflict with the occupation, for the resistance and the peace options, and for the way to adapt with the Arab regimes and the international community. Thus, it is unfair and simplistic too, to view the differences between Hamas and Fatah and between the governments of Ramallah and GS as a mere struggle for power. For it is illogical to consider Hamas' steadfastness versus the blockade and the Israeli aggression on the GS, as well as the hardship that it suffered from the closure of its institutions, imprisonment of its members of parliament and the sufferings of its supporters in the WB as just a desire by its leaders to enjoy being in power. Similarly, Fatah's insistence that Hamas recognizes the treaties concluded between the PLO and Israel and its insistence to accept forming a government whose program adheres to that of the PLO and to the conditions of the Quartet can only be seen as a drive towards a political program that includes recognition of Israel and the stoppage of resistance.

The Palestinian dialogue experienced three major crises:

1. The first crisis is related to the nature and orientation of the Palestinian national struggle, including its fundamentals, priorities, political program and ways to manage the struggle. For there were profound differences and confrontations between an ideological Islamic resistive path that aspires to achieve change and to impose new equations to administer the conflict, and, on the other hand, a pragmatic one that felt it necessary to acclimatize with Arab realism and the available resources.

2. A crisis of confidence that has aggravated because of the Palestinian schism, lawlessness, the dominance of Hamas over GS, the cooperation of the PA with the occupation to track Hamas and to try to uproot it, and the media and security campaign between the two sides.

3. The crisis of foreign pressure and conditions, where these two elements had always blocked progress in the national dialogue, though different and milder phraseology was used to present them, such as "adherence to the agreements signed by the PLO," and the "formation of a government that is capable to lift the blockade." Moreover, the American warnings of a halt to the peace process, suspension of aid and resumption of the blockade

of the WB have never stopped... if Hamas is to be part of a government that does not accept the conditions of the Quartet. The United States would raise no objections to the reconciliation as long as it leads towards the victory of Fatah in the elections, restoration of its authority in GS and the containment of Hamas or its marginalization and popular delegitimization. Any other courses mean the continuation of the siege and the crisis and even their aggravation.

The Israeli aggression on GS (27/12/2008–18/1/2009) represented a gigantic turning point in the sequence of events. For the brave steadfastness of the people and the resistance had dashed the hopes of some quarters to secure the downfall of Hamas by force. On the contrary, the substantial Arab-Islamic, even international sympathy that Hamas in particular and the resistance in general had won restored the glamour of both. This sympathy provided an exit to the predicament Hamas found itself in during autumn 2008, after declining to participate in the national dialogue in Cairo and blaming it for its failure. Meanwhile, the passive and confused performance of the government in Ramallah placed Fatah leadership and Fayyad in a critical situation. Hence forth, there were increasing calls within Fatah and the PA for dialogue to put the Palestinian house in order, and to stop the mutual antagonistic campaigns. Under this pressure, the PA had no option but to freeze the peace negotiations with Israel.

Hence, an outcome of the aggression on GS was the drive towards national dialogue. Besides, Hamas no longer felt that conditions may be imposed on her, or that it will be weakened or marginalized in the political process. Though by virtue of the Palestinian Basic Law the presidential duration of Mahmud ‘Abbas had expired on 9/1/2009, Hamas did not use this card against its adversaries, though it indicated from time to time that it is there and may be raised. Hamas appears to have decided to allow this issue to be an item of the agenda of the negotiations with its adversaries, where it may be used as a bargaining weapon in the presidency’s quest for political and legal exits.

The suspension of mutual media campaigns was instrumental in providing a conducive environment for the dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, which should have begun on 22/2/2009 had it not been for differences on the issue of the prisoners in the WB. While the PA in Ramallah denied the imprisonment of any of Hamas activists, the latter provided lists of about 500 detainees, and demanded that they be released before the

launching of the negotiations.<sup>1</sup> However, in February 2009 the PA in Ramallah released 21 prisoners and promised to release another 80 on 23/2/2009.<sup>2</sup> But a leader of Hamas, Ra'fat Nasif, denied the release of the latter group (80 detainees), and added, "What we see on the ground is a continuation of a campaign and practices that will have negative impact on the dialogue."<sup>3</sup>

The issue of Hamas' detainees in the WB continued to be one of the main controversial issues in the negotiations throughout the year, and it had been a reason for their stumbling from time to time. However, Fatah leadership refused to budge to all pressure under the guise that there are no political detainees. The real reason behind this adamant stand could be anybody's guess. Is it because of the desire of Fatah leadership to rule the WB uncontested, or to exploit the detainees' card to the maximum; or is it because it wants to demonstrate to the Israelis and Americans that it is abiding by its obligations to fight "terrorism," observe the provisions of the Road Map, and implement the security reforms that are supervised by the American general Keith Dayton? Thus, these procedures will be on a track separate from the track of the Palestinian dialogue.

Egypt, who was unanimously accepted to be the patron of the dialogue, had actively worked for this goal since the second half of 2008, and fixed 10/11/2008 as the starting date of the dialogue. But this did not materialize because Hamas and three other Palestinian factions declined to attend until the attainment of the following: Release of Hamas' detainees in WB, permission for its delegation from the WB to attend, and that President 'Abbas attends all the sessions of the dialogue not just the opening session.<sup>4</sup> Though Egypt was furious by these demands, it quickly accepted after the War on GS to resume its patronage and efforts to launch the dialogue.

Finally, Fatah and Hamas started the dialogue on 24–25/2/2009, and other factions followed suit on 26/2/2009. Five committees were formed to deliberate on the issues of elections, security, the PLO, the transitional government and the national reconciliation. Both Fatah and Hamas send signals of their keenness to make the dialogue a success

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<sup>1</sup> See *al-Hayat*, 19/2/2009.

<sup>2</sup> See *Felesteen*, 23/2/2009.

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 24/2/2009.

<sup>4</sup> See the statement of Khalil al-Hayyah, *Felesteen*, 12/11/2008.



story. While Mahmud ‘Abbas called Fatah delegation “to work for the success of the dialogue by all means,”<sup>5</sup> Khalid Mish‘al declared that Hamas had “magnanimously superseded” its bleeding wound in GS and the misery of hundreds of its prisoners in the WB in response to the calls of the dialogue, and to pursuit the all important project of national reconciliation.<sup>6</sup> Isma‘il Haniyyah had also emphasized that the “issue of national reconciliation and termination of the schism is a Hamas strategic decision that is unanimously endorsed by Hamas, and that the desire to work for the success of the dialogue is enthusiastically supported by both the interior and diaspora leadership and membership.”<sup>7</sup>

The dialogue conducted six sessions of which the last was on 28–30/6/2009, and progress appeared to have been achieved on several fronts. Egypt called for a seventh and final session on 25–27/7/2009 to sign the reconciliation on the next day of the session, but Hamas had once more insisted on the release of its prisoners in the WB prior to the signature of the reconciliation agreement, and accused Fatah of lack of seriousness with regard to the reconciliation and the termination of the schism.<sup>8</sup> However, the PA in Ramallah did not release the prisoners and the seventh session was not convened. Meanwhile, Fatah, who had become preoccupied with its sixth congress of 4/8/2009, declined to attend the proposed session on 25/8/2009 and asked for its indefinite postponement under the guise that the Palestinian National Council (PNC) will hold an emergency meeting on 26–27/8/2009.<sup>9</sup>

Evidently lack of trust and the historical differences between Fatah and Hamas made an agreement extremely difficult. These factors had led to an engagement in minute details to secure absolute guarantees for a successful agreement.

On the assumption of the American Presidency by Barak Obama and his apparent determination to press Israel to stop the settlement, Mahmud ‘Abbas and the PA in Ramallah were so optimistic of a breakthrough in the peace process that they decided to

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<sup>5</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 9/3/2009.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 1/3/2009.

<sup>7</sup> *Felesteen*, 19/3/2009.

<sup>8</sup> See *Asharq Alawsat*, 11/7/2009; and the statement of Mahmud al-Zahhar, *Alarab*, 11/7/2009; and the statement of Khalil al-Hayyah, Quds Press, 13/7/2009.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 20/8/2009.

shelve an agreement with Hamas lest it spoils the presumably positive environment in America, and because it might not offer the necessary concessions for a deal with Israel. What had further encouraged Fatah's intransigence was the decline in the glamour that Hamas had initially enjoyed as a result of the war on GS and the tightening of the siege on it, coupled with the destruction and prohibition of the reconstruction. By then, Fatah had increasingly talked of a government that accepts the conditions of the Quartet and the conduct of elections without settling the pending issues.

Meanwhile, Hamas had become increasingly suspicious that the entire dialogue process aimed at holding elections with guaranteed results, thus leading to the uproot of its popular legitimacy in GS. Moreover, it may secure the resumption of Fatah's control over the GS, strengthen its claims of leadership of the Palestinian people and of being their spokesperson, and place it in a better bargaining position in the expected peace negotiations.

During the dialogue sessions, Hamas focused on the necessity of a comprehensive agreement that should settle all the five major issues, and guarantees their parallel implementation on the ground. It also rejected outside pressure, particularly the conditions of the Quartet, and demanded the release of its prisoners in the WB prior to the signature of the agreement. Fatah, on the other hand, concentrated on the formation of a government of national consensus that should be qualified to lift the blockade, and conduct presidential and legislative elections.

Hamas assumed that the resignation of Fayyad government would be an indicator of Fatah's seriousness in the quest for the reconciliation. But the delegation given to Fayyad two months later to form a new government, as well as the decision of Fatah's leadership to convene the PNC in August 2009, under the pretext of completing the membership of the Executive Committee of the PLO, were, in the opinion of Hamas and the opposition forces, indicators of Fatah's retrogression from the reconciliation process. This is particularly so as the formation of the government and the election of the leadership of the PLO were integral parts of the dialogue, and that the decisions taken by Fatah on these issues were not only inopportune but harmful to the realization of a true and viable reconciliation agreement.

The formation of a government was, indeed, a very controversial issue. Fatah maintained that this government should be capable to lift the siege, thus had to abide by the political, program of the PLO and the treaties it signed.<sup>10</sup> In effect, this meant the acceptance of the Quartet conditions, including stoppage of the resistance and the recognition of Israel, which was categorically unacceptable to Hamas and the resistance factions. However, Hamas had no objection that the formation of this government be based on the National Conciliation Document of the Palestinian Prisoners, which had been almost totally accepted by all the factions. It had no objection also that this government has specific missions: the elections, the reconstruction of GS, and the reform of the security forces... and others.<sup>11</sup>

During the second session of the dialogue, and in response to a proposal by the DFLP and PIJ that the new government be without a political program, Ahmad Qurei‘, the leader of Fatah’s delegation, demanded that it should “embody a crystal clean recognition of Israel.”<sup>12</sup>

Abu Mazin tried to find a political exit on the issue of the new government that guarantees its recognition by the international community. He suggested that Hamas recommends four of its members to be ministers in the government of national consensus. Those will be like “commandos,” they’ll abide personally by the signed agreements and declare that they are on their own and they do not represent Hamas. However, Secretary of PLC, Mahmud al-Ramahi, had observed that this suggestion was not serious, let alone that Hamas will never accept it.<sup>13</sup>

The security issue was amongst the most complicated agenda of the dialogue, and it witnessed heated argumentation throughout the dialogue sessions. Initially, Fatah tried to restrict the security reforms to GS only, where it demanded that many of the security officials whose services had been terminated after Hamas’ control of the GS should be

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<sup>10</sup> See for example the statement of Mahmud ‘Abbas, *al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 1/3/2009; and his statement in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 9/3/2009, and the statement of Sa’ib ‘Uraiqat in *al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 9/6/2009.

<sup>11</sup> See the statement of Isma’il Radwan, *Asharq Alawsat*, 11/4/2009; and the statement of Khalil al-Hayyah, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 20/4/2009; and see *al-Hayat*, 4/6/2009.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 22/3/2009; and see the statement of Rabah Mohanna concerning the suggestion of the PFLP, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 28/3/2009; and *Asharq Alawsat*, 11/4/2009.

<sup>13</sup> See the statement of Mahmud al-Ramahi, *al-Khaleej*, 20/7/2009; and see also the statement of Hasan Khraishah, *Asharq Alawsat*, 5/7/2009.

allowed to return to their posts. But Hamas insisted that the WB be included in the security arrangements. However, the political detention and the security measures undertaken against the institutions in both GS and WB had clouded the prospects of the dialogue. Moreover, the assassination of a number of Hamas members by the officials of the PA in Qalqilya on 31/5/2009 was particularly harmful. In response to this tragic development, and after a meeting that he had with the Egyptian Minister ‘Omar Suleiman, director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate (EGID), Khalid Mish‘al said “The stumbling block of the Palestinian reconciliation are the arrests and abductions in the WB,” and added, “There is a persistent campaign undertaken by the PA’s security forces in the WB to uproot Hamas.”<sup>14</sup> However, the Egyptians had exerted great efforts, particularly in the summer of 2009, to resolve the issue of the detainees, including delegations that they sent to occupied Palestine and Damascus.<sup>15</sup>

All in all, the sixth session of the dialogue had apparently struck agreement on certain sensitive issues, like security and the detainees, which were acceptable to both parties. Fatah and Hamas had also agreed to form a joint committee of all factions, to coordinate and supervise the reconciliation agreement, and whose work will be done as soon as the elections are held.<sup>16</sup> But this item provoked the opposition of several of the PLO factions. It was rejected by the DFLP on the basis it will grant legitimacy to Hamas’ coup in GS, the PFLP on the other hand felt that this will consecrate the Palestinian schism, as the proposed committee will work towards coordination between the governments of GS and Ramallah.<sup>17</sup>

During August and September 2009, several obstacles seem to have been overcome. It was agreed to incorporate in GS’s security forces three thousand individuals who had previously worked in them, to reconstruct the security forces in the WB and the GS under the supervision of Egyptian and Arab officers, and to conduct the presidential and legislative elections on 25/6/2010. The latter should, however, be done through mixed system of constituencies (25%) and proportional (75%).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Felesteen*, 10/6/2009.

<sup>15</sup> See *al-Khaleej*, 8/7/2009; and *Alarab* 18–19/8/2009; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 19/8/2009.

<sup>16</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 2/7/2009.

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 2/7/2009.

<sup>18</sup> See the statement of ‘Izzat al-Rashaq, Quds Press, 2/10/2009; and the statement of Isma‘il Haniyyah, *al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 8/10/2009.

By early October, 2009 both Fatah and Hamas sent signals that the reconciliation agreement will be signed soon. In fact the Palestinian delegations were expected to meet on 19/10/2009, and the signature would take place six days later. But the demand of the PA to postpone the vote on the Goldstone report by the UN Human Rights Council had led to an outcry among the public and in the press, who doubted the honesty and credibility of the PA, and accused it of committing a “crime,” and of having no respect for the blood of the dead. Within this tense environment, Hamas asked Egypt to delay the signature ceremony of the reconciliation agreement pending restoration of calm and the bypass of the current bitterness. But the officials in Egypt saw in this postponement a great loss to the Palestinian people, and a sheer waste of the tremendous Egyptian effort.<sup>19</sup>

However, Egypt presented a final proposal of the Palestinian reconciliation agreement, and demanded that it be signed by both Fatah and Hamas by 15/10/2009 at the latest and by the other Palestinian factions within five days.<sup>20</sup> Being faced by the scandal of Goldstone report, Fatah hastily signed the agreement and Abu Mazin sent to Egypt on 15/10/2009, a personal envoy, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, to hand to the authorities in Cairo the text as signed by Fatah leaders.<sup>21</sup> As for Hamas, it asked for a grace period to read and revise the text, but Cairo firmly declared that the text which it prepared is final, not open to any further discussion, and that it should be signed as it is.<sup>22</sup>

### **A Résumé of the Egyptian Draft**

The Egyptian 22 page, 4,100 words draft of the reconciliation agreement, entitled “The Palestinian National Accord Agreement, Cairo 2009,” and handed to all the Palestinians factions, is one of the most detailed documents. Its contents may be summarized in the following:

**First: The PLO:** The document stipulated that the PLO should be reactivated and developed according to agreed bases, so that it includes all forces and factions. A new PNC, which represents the Palestinians of the interior and the Diaspora, should be formed. The delegated committee to develop the Organization should complete its

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<sup>19</sup> See *al-Hayat*, 8 and 11/10/2009; and *al-Akhbar* newspaper, Beirut, 9/10/2009.

<sup>20</sup> *Almustaqbal* newspaper, Beirut, 12/10/2009.

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi* and *al-Hayat*, 15/10/2009.

<sup>22</sup> *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 13/10/2009.

membership and hold its first meeting immediately after the implementation of this agreement. It should fix the relationship between the institutions and the structures as well as the functions of both the PLO and the PA in a way that maintains the authority of both of them and avoid duplicity.

Until the election of the new PNC, this committee will be authorized to establish the bases and working methods of the Council and to address the crucial political and national issues in a consensus manner, and to pursue the implementation of the decisions derived from the dialogue.

**Second: The Elections:** The PLC and presidential elections, as well as those of the PNC in the WB and GS, including Jerusalem, should be concurrently conducted on Monday 28/6/2010, and all should abide by this provision. The elections of the PNC should be based on complete proportional representation in the homeland and the Diaspora wherever possible. The PLC elections should be done through mixed system of constituencies (25%) and proportional (75%), and the qualifying threshold will be 2%. The Palestinian Territories (WB and GS) should be divided into 16 electoral districts (11 in WB and 5 in GS). The elections should be conducted under Arab and international supervision, and in a transparent, honest and fair way, and accompanied by elections monitoring procedures. The Palestinian president forms the electoral committee on the basis of the deliberations that he undertakes and according to the nominations given by the political forces and national figures.

**Third: Security:** The security provision calls for the enactment of the laws related to the security forces according to the functions allocated to them. These forces should be professional and non-factional, while the standards and bases for the reconstruction, restructuring and uniting of these forces should be defined. The security forces should be accountable to PLC. The provision stipulates that any intelligence cooperation and supply of information to the enemy that affects the nation, the citizens or the resistance be considered as high treason. It also provides for prohibition of political detention, respect of the security forces for the Palestinian right of resistance, and to detach the security institutions from political differences. It also records the prohibition of using arms for purposes other than the professional ones, and according to the recorded regulations.

The document provides for a supreme security committee that is formed due to a presidential decree, its members are professional officers. It should exercise its duty of implementing The Palestinian National Accord Agreement in WB and GS under Egyptian and Arab supervision. Amongst its functions is to enact and supervise the implementation of security policies, and to rebuild and restructure, with Arab and Egyptian assistance, the security forces in a way that maintains the rights of all their employees.

**Fourth: National Reconciliations:** The document calls for dissemination of the culture of tolerance, reconciliation, political partnership and co-existence, and to resolve all the violations resulting from the lawlessness and schism in a legal and legitimate manner. Moreover, the document provided for the setting of a program to compensate financially and morally all the victims of schism and violence. It called for putting the necessary bases and mechanism to prevent the repetition of the sad events, for the firm stand against all kinds of mutual incitements, for the punishment of all individuals who commit crimes against the people and their property irrespective of their organizational, tribal or family affiliation, and for the issuance of an honor covenant that stipulates the prohibition of inter-Palestinian fighting.

**Fifth: The Joint Committee for the Implementation of the National Accord Agreement:** This committee should be composed of 16 members who represent Fatah, Hamas, the factions and the independents. Each of Fatah and Hamas nominates eight members, and, after a consensus on the membership, President Mahmud ‘Abbas will form this committee by a presidential decree. In his capacity as the President of PLO and the PA, President ‘Abbas will be the authority for this committee. However, the committee is a coordinating body without any political obligations or functions. It should start functioning once the agreement is signed, and its work should be terminated after the elections and the formation of a new Palestinian government. The committee is authorized to implement the reconciliation agreement through coordination with the relevant quarters, prepare the environment for the conduct of the presidential and PLC elections as well as those of the PNC, supervise and settle all issues related to the Palestinian internal reconciliation and to pursue the operations of the reconstruction of GS.

The document also provides for the settlement of the civil cases and the administrative problems resulting from the schism, including the appointment and promotion of officials, and to decide on the suspension of salaries and transfer of officials within the government institutions and divisions, as well as the relevant but controversial presidential and governmental ordinances and decrees through a special legal and administrative committee. The document calls for the return of all civil servants, who had been in service before 14/6/2007 (the military takeover in GS), to their posts in the WB and GS, including the dismissed and the absentees because of the schism. Moreover, the document provides for the formation of advisory units to settle the legal cases in coordination with the relevant parties.

The document considered all individuals who were exposed to all kinds of harm during the time of the internal confrontations as victims of violence. The National Reconciliation Committee should see to it that the PA shoulders the responsibility of settling their cases.

**Sixth: The Detainees:** Both Fatah and Hamas should provide according to the latest information lists of the detainees in their prisons, of which copies should be handed, after verification and before the signature of the National Accord Agreement, to Egypt and an agreeable legal firm. Each side should release all the detainees from all factions immediately after the signature of the agreement.<sup>23</sup>

The signature by the leadership of Fatah and the PA in Ramallah of this document and the hesitation of Hamas to do so had provided a much needed political exit for the former from their scandalous decision to postpone the discussion of Goldstone report in the United Nations. It also enabled them to launch an extensive media campaign against Hamas, who was accused of obstructing the efforts towards national unity and reconciliation. Fatah had made utmost use of the genuine Palestinian-Arab-international desire for a reconciliation to push Hamas into a tight corner. Hamas, who refused to sign under pressure and before ascertaining the compatibility of the text with the minutes of the sessions of the dialogue, appeared to be rather confused. This was reflected in the different statements of its leaders on the probability of signature and on the remarks on

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<sup>23</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 15/10/2009.



the document that should be given due consideration. Hamas found it extremely difficult to convince the ordinary observer of the validity of its rationale for declining to sign. Moreover, there were rumors of differences of opinion between Hamas leaderships in GS and Damascus, whereby the latter was said to be more extreme on the issue than the former.

Lack of confidence and bitter historical experiences have been behind Hamas' insistence on closely checking the text, and on insisting to incorporate some expressions that, in its opinion, were essential to prevent future attempts to retreat from the undertakings by the other side. Hamas insisted on the incorporation of some modifications in the text, or to have them in a legally and politically binding appendix to the text. The most significant of those observations may be summarized in the following:

1. To add a sentence to the paragraph on the PLO, after the part that explains the provisional leadership framework until the conduct of the PLC elections, to the effect, "the above functions are not subject to suspension as they are viewed as a national consensus."

2. To amend the paragraph on the electoral committee to read, "The formation of an electoral committee through consensus, and the president issues a decree to this effect." This is different from the text in the document which stipulates that the Palestinian President forms the electoral committee on the basis of the deliberations that he undertakes and according to the nominations given by the political forces and national figures.

3. Addition of a text that clarifies that the formation of the supreme security committee should be consensually agreed upon.

4. To replace the word "rebuild" by the word "build" in the following text: "to rebuild and restructure, with Arab and Egyptian assistance, the security forces."<sup>24</sup>

But the Egyptian government and Fatah refused to consider any discussion or amendment to the document. Thus, the project of reconciliation faced some obstacles. The interference of some Palestinian quarters, like the PFLP and independent personalities like Munib al-Masri, failed to provide suitable solutions. Attempts for mediation by Qatar, KSA, Sudan and Libya, which continued up to the eve of the Arab summit in Sirte, Libya late March 2010, had also failed.

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<sup>24</sup> For Hamas's remarks on the Egyptian paper see Aljazeera.net, 18–19/10/2009; and *Asharq Alawsat*, 20/10/2009; and *al-Sharq*, Doha, 23/10/2009; and *al-Hayat*, 26/10/2009.

## The Developments of 2010

Palestinian political reconciliation was perhaps the defining story of 2010, aside from the occupation itself. The attempts and maneuvers around reconciliation are detailed, but are worth considering in detail as they reveal the dynamics at play on the Palestinian political scene. While insisting in the past that its paper on the reconciliation issue should be signed by all the Palestinian factions verbatim, Egypt had by 2010 agreed to annex to it a paper agreeable to all the factions. However, despite this apparent progress, the deadlock on the reconciliation issue had, in reality, continued.

Initially, Fatah had insisted that Hamas should sign the Egyptian paper, and President ‘Abbas refused to have any meetings with Khalid Mish‘al, head of the Hamas political bureau, before this signature. In this respect, ‘Abbas said that within an hour of Hamas’ signature his administration would meet with them, but not before. He also emphasized that the signing ceremony of the reconciliation agreement should take place in Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

Anxious to strike a reconciliation deal, Nabil Sha‘th, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, tried to mediate between the two conflicting parties, and visited the GS for this very specific purpose. But the differences between the two sides were too deep to be resolved. Commenting on this visit, PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas said that Sha‘th did not travel to GS on his own initiative but in compliance with a PA decision. ‘Abbas denied any connection between this visit and the reconciliation, and added, “Sha‘th’s visit was just under this pretext, and his visit to Haniyyah’s house was beyond his terms of reference, and is unacceptable.”<sup>2</sup>

Some non-aligned personalities, under the leadership of independent politician Yasir al-Wadiah, also exerted some efforts in the interest of the reconciliation, but to no avail.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, President Mahmud ‘Abbas, informed Libya, Egypt, KSA and Jordan that he would not attend the Arab summit scheduled in Libya on 27/3/2010 to discuss the reconciliation issue if Khalid Mish‘al was also due to attend.<sup>4</sup> Mish‘al refused to

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<sup>1</sup> *Assabeel*, 18/1/2010.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 27/2/2010.

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, 4/2/2010.

<sup>4</sup> *Aljazeera.net*, 13/2/2010.

comment on President ‘Abbas’ declarations and said that Hamas was ready to sign the Palestinian reconciliation agreement before or after the summit in Libya.<sup>5</sup>

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait reiterated that the Egyptian reconciliation paper is submitted for signature only, and that all comments will be considered only during implementation.<sup>6</sup>

Hamas repeated its accusations of US obstruction of the reconciliation process, and Mish‘al went as far as to say that the US government had essentially vetoed reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah.<sup>7</sup>

However, despite the stalling over negotiations, there were increasing indications that Hamas was prepared to be flexible provided that some of its wishes were adhered to. These wishes included the proposed provisional leadership to take charge until the re-election of PLO institutions, which “should not be hampered” in carrying out government functions, and that President Mahmud ‘Abbas forms, in partnership with Hamas, an elections committee and a supreme security committee to supervise the implementation of the reconciliation agreement, as well as to rebuild and restructure security forces in the WB and GS.

The delay in concluding the reconciliation agreement meant that the originally proposed election date of 28/6/2010, had to be postponed, requiring agreement on a new date. Other proposals demanded that the Hamas recommendations must “be annexed to the Egyptian paper and become part and parcel of it,” and that it must be signed by the relevant parties as well as the patrons and guarantors of the reconciliation agreement.<sup>8</sup>

After accusations and counter accusations between the two parties regarding the delay of reconciliation, and the failure of a number of mediation attempts by, inter alia, KSA, Qatar and Turkey, a new breakthrough took place. In a meeting at Mecca between Khalid Mish‘al and the EGID Head ‘Omar Suleiman, the latter said that he would have no objection to a Fatah and Hamas agreement on the understanding that the proposed agreement address the latter’s remarks on the Egyptian paper before its signature.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Al-Dar* newspaper, Kuwait, 17/2/2010.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, 21/2/2010.

<sup>7</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 2/3/2010.

<sup>8</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 19/3/2010.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 6/10/2010.

This breakthrough coincided with the resumption of direct negotiations with Israel and the intransigence of its government on the issue of freezing the Israeli settlement building. Many connected the failure of negotiations with Israel and this breakthrough, for the PA, supported by Egypt, would find it tactically useful to reactivate the reconciliation effort in order to put pressure on Israel during negotiations.

The first session of reconciliation talks was held in Damascus on 24/9/2010, during which it was agreed to form a consensus elections' committee and a consensus elections' court, fix a new date for the elections, and to form a caretaker leadership to be in charge until the PLO is restructured in accordance with the provisions in the Egyptian reconciliation paper. 'Azzam al-Ahmad, a member of the Fatah Central Committee and the head of its parliamentary bloc, said that the meeting between Fatah and Hamas resolved three issues: the elections, the elections' court and the PLO. But, he indicated that the issue of security remained pending, and would only be resolved with the help of experts in this area.<sup>10</sup>

Ali Barakah, the senior Hamas political official in Lebanon, said that the movement would discuss with Fatah in Damascus the resumption of Palestinian dialogue under Egyptian patronage. Talks would aim at the formation of a supreme security committee to supervise the reactivation and restructuring of the security forces. He explained that "the two movements had agreed in their previous meeting in Damascus to rebuild and restructure the security forces in the WB and GS concurrently, and not in GS alone," while the formation of the security committee to supervise this rebuilding and restructuring was postponed to the next meeting.<sup>11</sup>

Hamas leader Mahmud al-Zahhar stated that "Fatah has agreed on Hamas's point of view regarding the central elections committee, the judicial committee on elections, and the interim leadership in the PLO, which Fatah had been previously rejected."<sup>12</sup>

In an attempt to resolve the final crucial issue, namely the security arrangements, the two movements met once more in Damascus on 9/11/2010. But the meeting ended

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<sup>10</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, 26/9/2010.

<sup>11</sup> *Alghad*, 6/10/2010.

<sup>12</sup> PIC, 8/10/2010.

acrimoniously with each side blaming the other for the failure to reconcile. While Fatah blamed Hamas for not being consistent in its demands, the latter claimed that Fatah insisted on dominating the supreme committee that was to oversee the security forces in the WB and GS, adamantly refusing Hamas participation in it. Hamas also complained that Fatah wanted to restrict the restructuring of the security forces to the GS only. Hamas suspected that the US and Israel wanted to veto the whole process of reconciliation. Some Palestinian sources attributed the failure of this meeting to the insistence of Fatah, specifically Majid Faraj, head of Palestinian general intelligence in rejecting any changes to the security forces in the occupied WB.<sup>13</sup>

Some Palestinian sources revealed to *al-Hayat* newspaper that the two sides reached a compromise whereby previous understandings were rewritten. The revised version stipulated that the two movements would name the members of the elections committee, but it ignored the proviso in the September version that this consultation be by “consensus.” However, when Hamas suggested that the phrasing of the compromise be applied to the judicial committee on elections, Fatah objected on the grounds that the judiciary “is independent, and that this independence should not be infringed upon by the movements.” Ultimately, the two sides agreed to add the following phrase, “There should be no differences on the judges” between the Palestinian factions.

On the issue of the provisional leadership, scheduled to be in charge until the reactivation of the institutions of the PLO, Fatah suggested an addition to the expression “the functions of the expected caretaker leadership cannot be annulled”—that was agreed upon previously in the first session—with the phrase “Without contradicting the functions of the Executive Committee of the PLO.” When reviewing the date of the forthcoming elections, the two sides agreed that it should be within eight to twelve months from the signature of the Egyptian reconciliation paper so that the two parties could prepare for the elections in a “free and fair environment in the WB and GS.”

The stumbling block remained the fifth point, namely the security issue. Previously, the two sides had agreed to “rebuild and restructure the security forces in the WB and GS,” but the formation of a supreme security committee, remained unresolved. Sources

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi electronic newspaper, Amman, 11/11/2010.

revealed that the astonishing development in the meeting was the insistence of Majid Faraj, head of Palestinian general intelligence, that there would be no partnership in security matters. Fatah was insisting that political and electoral partnerships were possible, but in security this is impossible. Fatah's stance was unusual as security forces are commonly founded on national basis without participation or partnership. The Fatah position was viewed by Hamas as a retreat from the previous agreements and a setback to creating conducive environment for reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

It is worth noting that the delegation led by Majid Faraj to discuss the security issue reveals the position of weakness of Fatah in having no real authority over the security forces and security policy in the WB. This explains Faraj's refusal to discuss WB security forces in any dialogue.

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<sup>14</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 17/11/2010.

## The Developments of 2011

The issue of the Palestinian reconciliation is one of the most complicated ongoing issues on the Palestinian scene. Every Palestinian, irrespective of their intellectual orientation and party loyalty, hopes to see a resolution to the split. The internal schism has overburdened the Palestinians and discredited their case internationally.

As the Egyptian revolution gained momentum in 2011, a significant change occurred in Fatah's position towards the issue of reconciliation, namely, its acceptance of Hamas' observations on the Egyptian proposal.<sup>1</sup> But, by then, Hamas had tabled new conditions which, in effect, meant that for reconciliation to be successfully concluded, it would need to be taken outside the domain of the Egyptian document.<sup>2</sup> Following this stumbling progress, Fatah offered to conduct elections,<sup>3</sup> but Hamas refused on the grounds that it was preoccupied with crystallizing a comprehensive national vision within an initiative to end the schism.<sup>4</sup> Simultaneous to this development, both movements turned down an initiative by Salam Fayyad to maintain both governments, in GS and Ramallah; Hamas had by this point started to exhibit some flexibility towards the Egyptian paper.<sup>5</sup>

Following an Egyptian declaration that Palestinian reconciliation was the primary concern of the new Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil al-'Arabi,<sup>6</sup> the issue was once more raised. But this was not enough for it to be seriously pursued, as there were still differences between Fatah and Hamas on the interpretations of some points and observations in the Egyptian document.

The Arab Spring inspired a popular movement in both the WB and GS to end the schism, which included a massive march, scheduled in late March. Isma'il Haniyyah took advantage of this moment to give a televised speech, in which he invited Fatah to a comprehensive dialogue, to be held anywhere, to conclude reconciliation.<sup>7</sup> 'Abbas quickly and positively responded to this invitation by offering to visit GS and to form a

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Sharq*, 6/1/2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 9/1/2011.

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, /2/2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Addustour*, 2-3/3/2011.

<sup>5</sup> Quds Press, 5/3/2011.

<sup>6</sup> *Almesryoon* newspaper, Cairo, 10/3/2011.

<sup>7</sup> Felesteen Online, 15/3/2011.

consensus government.<sup>8</sup> But, because of some media skirmishes and political differences between the two sides, this visit did not materialize.<sup>9</sup>

Egypt's strict neutrality after the collapse of Mubarak regime had been a primary factor for enabling the acceptance of the Egyptian document by all the concerned parties. By then, Egypt had revived its patronage of the process of reconciliation, and its more general role towards Palestinian issue, which was based on the primacy of the conclusion and implementation of reconciliation.

The Egyptians supervised serious follow-up meetings between Hamas and Fatah during March and April. Though Turkey had tried to act as an intermediary between Fatah and Hamas,<sup>10</sup> the reconciliation issue remained an exclusive Egyptian concern, until it was finally announced that the reconciliation agreement had been signed by the two movements in Cairo on 27/4/2011.

The initiating of the reconciliation agreement certainly came as a pleasant surprise for all the Palestinians who had been extremely frustrated by the long schism. In Cairo, on 3/5/2011, the agreement was officially signed and the next day it was celebrated in a ceremony attended by all the Palestinian factions. The Palestinians were full of hope that they could bypass the past and to open a new page in domestic Palestinian relations, especially after both movements emphasized in their speeches their determination to achieve national unity and to put the Palestinian house in order. However, aware of the history of past experience, many Palestinians were concerned with the overall phraseology of the text of the agreement and by the fact that new rounds of dialogue between the two sides were needed in order to reach common agreement on many details of the reconciliation.

Palestinian forces and factions had on the whole welcomed the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, though they demanded that there should be sufficient guarantees to see it through.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, some factions, like PIJ<sup>12</sup> and

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<sup>8</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 17/3/2011.

<sup>9</sup> Site of Alresalah, 20/3/2011, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/>; and Wafa, 25/3/2011; and Quds Press, 29/3/2011; and *Alittihad* newspaper, Abu Dhabi, 31/3/2011.

<sup>10</sup> PIC, 7/4/2011; and *Albayan* newspaper, Dubai, 10/4/2011.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 29/4/2011.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 3/5/2011.



DFLP<sup>13</sup> voiced reservations, while several others called for going beyond this bilateral framework into a comprehensive national agreement.

The inconsistent reactions of Israel and the US to the deal seemed to demonstrate that the conclusion of the agreement had taken them by surprise. Immediately after its initiating, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, commented that the “Palestinian Authority must choose either peace with Israel or peace with Hamas. There is no possibility for peace with both,”<sup>14</sup> and further stated that Washington “should consider stopping economic aid to the Palestinian Authority if a Hamas-Fatah unity government did not recognize Israel and renounce terror,”<sup>15</sup> while his Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said that with “this accord, a red line has been crossed,” and warned that the elections envisaged under the agreement would allow Hamas “to take control of Judaea and Samaria.”<sup>16</sup>

“Speaking to the American legislators, Netanyahu quoted remarks by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in April 2009, that Israel would not hold talks with or economically support a Palestinian government, including Hamas, until Hamas recognized Israel and abandoned violence.” Moreover, a meeting of the seven member Israeli ministerial forum known as the Septet declared its decision to launch a diplomatic campaign, with particular emphasis on the European Union (EU), to thwart international recognition of the unified Fatah-Hamas government.<sup>17</sup> As a precursor, Israel implemented its threats to suspend the transfer of clearance revenue to the PA.<sup>18</sup>

Notwithstanding explicit Israeli threats of dire consequences, other official sources gave a different angle to the official position. Amos Gilad, head of the Defense Ministry Diplomatic-Security Bureau, declared that a real reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas remained unlikely and farfetched.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ma'an News Agency, 4/5/2011.

<sup>14</sup> *Haaretz* newspaper, 27/4/2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/netanyahu-palestinian-authority-must-choose-peace-with-israel-or-hamas-1.358460>

<sup>15</sup> *Haaretz*, 29/4/2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/netanyahu-presses-for-u-s-action-over-fatah-hamas-deal-1.358706>

<sup>16</sup> Ma'an, 28/4/2011, <http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=382904> (in English)

<sup>17</sup> *Haaretz*, 29/4/2011.

<sup>18</sup> Reuters, 1/5/2011. (in Arabic)

<sup>19</sup> Quds Net, 30/4/2011.

The American administration was extremely disturbed by the conclusion of the reconciliation agreement, and some members of the Congress demanded that it should lead to the stoppage of all American aid to the PA.<sup>20</sup> However, the Director of Policy Planning in the State Department, Jake Sullivan, declared that Washington would continue with its aid to the PA under the leadership of ‘Abbas and Fayyad,<sup>21</sup> reflecting a relatively balanced and rational American position in comparison to the hasty Israeli response.

The implementation of Palestinian reconciliation faltered as a result of the following issues:

**1. Political detention:** While the Palestinians were hopeful, after the conclusion of the reconciliation agreement, of a promising new era, the security forces in the WB continued their customary practices including arrests of Hamas activists. Hence, senior Hamas figure, Musa Abu Marzuq accused certain elements within Fatah of obstructing reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Isma‘il Haniyyah criticized the wave of summonses and arrests, and called for an honest implementation of the reconciliation agreement,<sup>23</sup> while Khalid Mish‘al, head of the Hamas Political Bureau, declared that the practices pursued in the WB contradict the spirit of the reconciliation agreement, emphasizing that they are part of the past; a dark chapter in the schism that should be closed once and for all.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, political detention continued notwithstanding the repeated official assurances that it would cease.

**2. The political program:** Though ‘Abbas declared immediately after the signature of the reconciliation agreement that the major concern of the new consensus government would be elections and the reconstruction of GS, he soon backed down, and began emphasizing that the transitional government was still his government, and it would be adhere to the policy of the PLO.<sup>25</sup> This sudden change of heart predictably provoked the ire of Hamas, who emphasized through a member of its political bureau, Mahmud al-Zahhar, that the Palestinian people should not be held hostage to ‘Abbas’ political program,<sup>26</sup> while another leader of the movement, Salah al-Bardawil, declared that the agreed upon government was not that of the President, and it was to carry no political

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<sup>20</sup> Sama, 28/4/2011.

<sup>21</sup> Special Briefing, Jake Sullivan, Director of Policy Planning, Washington, DC, site of U.S. Department of State, 29/4/2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/04/162256.htm>

<sup>22</sup> *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 4/5/2011.

<sup>23</sup> Felesteen Online, 5/5/2011.

<sup>24</sup> PIC, 7/5/2011.

<sup>25</sup> WAFA, 4/5/2011.

<sup>26</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/5/2011.

program, as it was to be a government of technocrats.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the sharp differences between Hamas and Fatah on this issue continued, without any conciliatory settlement in prospect.

**3. The proposed new government:** Immediately after the end of the official signing ceremony of the reconciliation agreement in Cairo, Fatah and Hamas embarked on bilateral meetings to explore mechanisms for implementing the items of the agreement, notably the formation of a national consensus government.

Notwithstanding the positive environment that dominated the early meetings, held between the two sides under the patronage of the EGID in Cairo, consensus on the mechanisms for the formation of the new government and the involvement of other Palestinian factions in the discussions, things went back to square one once Fayyad was proposed for the premiership of the national government. The dialogue between the two sides reached to a virtual stalemate, as ‘Abbas insisted on Fayyad and Hamas outright rejected the idea.<sup>28</sup>

With the failure of the dialogue between Fatah and Hamas on the formation of the national government, which would have theoretically ended the schism, and in spite of the assurance of Musa Abu Marzuq that the movement was ready to form a government acceptable to the West in order to end the siege,<sup>29</sup> some informed Palestinian sources were inclined to believe that the issue of the formation of the new government would be postponed until September 2011. This was said to be a result of American-Israeli pressure on the PA, and to await the outcome of the PA’s bid for recognition of the Palestinian state at the UN,<sup>30</sup> a move that had been rejected by Hamas.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, ‘Abbas appealed to Egypt’s SCAF Chairman Field Marshal Muhammad Hussein Tantawi, to persuade Hamas to accept Fayyad,<sup>32</sup> and, on another occasion, he told the EGID leadership that Washington had given him only one option: accept Fayyad or to face American boycott.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Quds Press, 16/5/2011.

<sup>28</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 29/5/2011.

<sup>29</sup> *Almustaqbal*, 16/6/2011.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 7/6/2011.

<sup>31</sup> PIC, 7/6/2011.

<sup>32</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 31/5/2011.

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Sharq*, 21/6/2011.

Criticism of the Palestinian factions because of the failure to reconcile fully was rife and extended to disagreements within Fatah's leadership on 'Abbas' insistence on Fayyad. But 'Abbas remained adamant. A deadlock developed, media battles continued, and there was news of Turkish intercession between the two sides that focused on convincing Hamas to accept Fayyad.<sup>34</sup> Things dragged on until September, at which point the PA failed in its bid for full UN membership, amidst sporadic dialogue between the two sides.

The above failure prepared the ground for new dialogue in order to implement the faltering reconciliation agreement, and new, higher level, dialogue was actually conducted, in preparation for a summit between 'Abbas and Mish'al towards the end of November. Public assurances were given that the predicament of naming the new prime minister had been overcome. For the first time signs of mutual agreement on this issue emerged, as 'Azzam al-Ahmad, a member of Fatah's Central Committee, declared that Fayyad had been excluded from the deliberations of the formation of the government.<sup>35</sup> But he soon came back to say that Fatah's position on his nomination had not yet changed.<sup>36</sup>

All hopes rested on the summit between Mish'al and 'Abbas, held on 23/11/2011 in Cairo, producing a bilateral declaration that committed both sides to meaningful national partnership, and the launching of practical efforts towards achieving internal domestic reconciliation.<sup>37</sup> 'Azzam al-Ahmad declared that an agreement between the two parties had been reached on the implementation of the political program during the next phase of reconciliation, as well as on the future of the PA, the PLO, the Palestinian State, the societal reconciliation, the holding of elections on schedule, the consolidation of the armistice in the WB and GS, recognition of popular resistance and the settlement of the issue of detainees within days. Moreover, he announced that the two parties had agreed to continue deliberations on the issue of the government, and that a meeting between 'Abbas and Mish'al would be held on this and all other outstanding issues.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Site of al-Watan Online, Saudi Arabia, 13/7/2011, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Default.aspx?issueno=4183>

<sup>35</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 15/11/2011.

<sup>36</sup> The Arabic site of Xinhua News Agency, 19/11/2011, <http://arabic.news.cn/>

<sup>37</sup> Wafa, 24/11/2011.

<sup>38</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 25/11/2011.

During the meeting, it was agreed to convene the interim leadership framework which would handle the reactivation, development and restructuring the PLO. ‘Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas’ Political Bureau, declared that the meeting was positive, frank and transparent, and had served to launch a new phase in which the Palestinians could move on from the prevailing political stalemate and explicit American hostility towards Palestinian demands.<sup>39</sup> Despite this injection of momentum, a subsequent meeting between Mish‘al and ‘Abbas did not produce anything new, which impelled Mish‘al to caution against foreign intervention aimed at aborting the reconciliation.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Mahmud al-Zahhar spoke of ‘Abbas’ lack of determination to see the agreement through,<sup>41</sup> while Mahir al-Tahir, a member of the PFLP, warned against administering the schism rather than ending it.<sup>42</sup>

On 18/12/2011, Fatah and Hamas’ delegations met under Egyptian patronage, where they declared practical steps to resolve pending issues, amongst which were political detainees, passports, freedom of movement, and the return of escapees from GS.<sup>43</sup> This created a new environment of optimism, and triggered Mahmud al-Zahhar, who had participated in all these meetings, to state that a breakthrough had occurred on many issues vital to reconciliation.<sup>44</sup>

On 20/12/2011, the Palestinian factions met in Cairo and reached a consensus on the members of the central elections committee, committee of freedom and confidence building in the WB and GS, and the societal reconciliation committee. Moreover, it was agreed that the issue of the formation of the new government should be finalized by the end of January 2012, and that the parliamentary blocs should hold an exploratory meeting in Cairo to be followed by another one in the WB and GS. A presidential decree was to be issued calling for the PLC to convene in February 2012.<sup>45</sup> Some practical considerations relating to internal conditions and external intervention cast serious doubt

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Sudanese Online* newspaper interview with Khalid Mish‘al, head of Hamas Political Bureau, 28/11/2011.

<sup>41</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 30/11/2011.

<sup>42</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 9/12/2011.

<sup>43</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 19/12/2011.

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 20/12/2011.

<sup>45</sup> *Felesteen Online*, 21/12/2011.

on the chances of concluding the deal, leading some to suggest that both Fayyad and Haniyyah's governments would continue in power until elections.<sup>46</sup>

Following the decision to refer some of stumbling blocks to reconciliation to factional committees, Mish'al declared that no single person could monopolize political decision making, nor the administration of the institutions of the PA and the PLO,<sup>47</sup> and that no elections would be held before the formation of the desired unity government.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, political summons and detention by the security forces continued in the WB, notwithstanding the agreement between the two parties to conclusively and finally end this practice, which motivated Hamas to emphasize that there were elements attempting to abort the Palestinian reconciliation agreement.<sup>49</sup>

Hamas' suspicion seemed well-placed, as reconciliation remained dormant in spite of the consensus agreed upon in some of the committees, particularly with regard to political detention, freedom of movement and travel and the issues of freedom. Things remained stagnant until early February 2012 when Hamas and Fatah agreed that President 'Abbas would lead an interim national consensus government. But even this breakthrough did not herald the end of the conflict over the issue of the government and a number of barriers to reconciliation remained.

However, though, under internal and external pressure, the government file may be settled in the foreseeable future, the whole reconciliation process appears, at best, to continue to be extremely slow in the next phase. This is due to the PA security forces which continue to act in a way that renders reconciliation issue practically void of its major themes and concerns, refusing to respond positively to agreements made on the issues of freedom and the release of political detainees.

Weighing up prevailing conditions, no major breakthrough should be expected on reconciliation until presidential and PLC elections are held. Many view this to have been the very aim of the PA and Fatah in creating so many delays.

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<sup>46</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 20/12/2011.

<sup>47</sup> PIC, 24/12/2011.

<sup>48</sup> al-Watan Online, 25/12/2011.

<sup>49</sup> Felesteen Online, 27/12/2011.

## The Developments of 2012–2013

The issue of Palestinian reconciliation in 2012 and 2013 saw many developments on the theoretical level. However, the two sides of the Palestinian divide did not succeed in translating these into concrete steps on the ground.

The Doha Declaration, which was concluded in early 2012, remained ink on paper. Bilateral talks that took place with Egyptian sponsorship until the coup in Egypt did not succeed in putting the Declaration into practice, with mutual accusations over disrupting reconciliation. However, the end of the year 2013 saw some positive developments and initiatives to support reconciliation, especially by Haniyyah's government. The Doha Declaration was one of the most important milestones in the Palestinian reconciliation process and national dialogue. No sooner had the first month of 2012 ended than an important development took place in the dialogue of Fatah and Hamas, when Khalid Mish'al and President 'Abbas signed the Doha Declaration, which was sponsored directly by the Emir of Qatar on 6/2/2012.

The Declaration called for the formation of a Palestinian National Reconciliation Government of independent technocrats headed by President 'Abbas; the continuation of the steps of activating and developing the PLO through the reformation of PNC simultaneously with the presidential and legislative elections; continuation of the works of the committees that were formed, namely the General Freedoms Committee and the Community Reconciliation Committee. After that, the Declaration calls for the implementation of what was agreed upon in Cairo to begin the work of the Central Elections Commission (CEC), paving the way for President 'Abbas to set a date for presidential and PLC elections, as well as PNC elections.<sup>1</sup> The Doha Declaration ended months of debating between the two movements over the name of the consensus prime minister who would lead the government entrusted with implementing reconciliation and holding elections.

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<sup>1</sup> Full Text of the Doha Declaration Signed Between Hamas and Fatah, site of Middle East Monitor (MEMO), 8/2/2012, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/3397-full-text-of-the-doha-declaration-signed-between-hamas-and-fatah>

The ink on the Declaration had barely dried when disputes emerged between Mish'al and 'Abbas over Hamas's position on the agreement. Some Hamas leaders sprung to express their opposition to charging 'Abbas with heading the national reconciliation government, including member of the Political Bureau Mahmud al-Zahhar, who publicly rejected the agreement, and Khalil al-Hayyeh, who presented his opposition from a legal standpoint.<sup>2</sup>

The opposition of the Hamas Change and Reform parliamentary bloc in the PLC was another obstacle to the agreement. Isma'il al-Ashqar, deputy head of the bloc, said that the Doha Declaration was against the law and that it bypassed the PLC.<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Bahr, acting speaker of the PLC, joined the internal opposition within Hamas. Bahr said that the appointment of 'Abbas as per the Doha Declaration violated the Palestinian Basic Law, declaring his rejection of the concentration of powers in the hands of one man.<sup>4</sup>

Based on the objections made by Hamas leaders in GS, who were upset for not having been consulted before the agreement was signed, Mish'al had an urgent meeting with Haniyyah on 15/2/2012 in Doha to address the situation. The two men agreed and ended differences within Hamas over the implementation of the Doha Declaration.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the Doha Declaration was not put into practice because Fatah and Hamas differed over how it should be implemented, each party according to its own rationale. This prompted the gathering of independent personalities headed by businessman Yasir al-Wadiah to propose an urgent initiative on 28/4/2012 to implement reconciliation between the two parties.<sup>6</sup>

With the failure of the implementation in its first phase, Fatah and Hamas entered into a new stage from May 2012 until the end of the year. On 20/5/2012, two delegations representing Fatah and Hamas chaired by 'Azzam al-Ahmad and Musa Abu Marzuq met in Cairo under Egyptian auspices, and agreed to establish CEC in GS and begin

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<sup>2</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, 12/2/2012; and Lebanese Communication Group (Al-Manar Channel), 12/2/2012, <http://www.almanar.com.lb/main.php>; and *al-Hayat*, 13/2/2012.

<sup>3</sup> Quds Press, 6/2/2012.

<sup>4</sup> Felesteen Online, 15/2/2012.

<sup>5</sup> PIC, 15/2/2012.

<sup>6</sup> Quds Press, 28/4/2012.



consultations to form a government.<sup>7</sup> In another meeting, on 28–29/5/2012, the two sides resolved the outstanding issues related to forming a national reconciliation government,<sup>8</sup> paving the way for a third meeting on 5/6/2012. In this meeting, the two movements agreed to expedite the process of naming the members of the reconciliation government and announced it officially on 20/6/2012, in the presence of Mish‘al and ‘Abbas.<sup>9</sup> But none of this materialized. On 25/6/2012, Musa Abu Marzuq said an American veto was disrupting the process of Palestinian reconciliation,<sup>10</sup> but ‘Azzam al-Ahmad denied there was any American veto on reconciliation.<sup>11</sup>

Accordingly, tension between the two sides returned. On 2/7/2012, Hamas suspended voter registration in GS, because of security crackdowns in the WB.<sup>12</sup> Hamas also rejected a decision by the Fayyad government on 10/7/2012 to hold local elections in the WB, something that Hamas said undermined reconciliation efforts.<sup>13</sup>

For its part, al-Ahmad stressed on behalf of Fatah that there would be no return to reconciliation talks with Hamas except after the CEC resumed its work in GS.<sup>14</sup> This was denied by Hamas through Haniyyah, who pointed out that the US had asked the PA to suspend reconciliation talks.<sup>15</sup>

In an interview with the press on 20/9/2012, al-Ahmad reiterated Fatah’s unwillingness to start any new dialogue with Hamas, saying what was required was to begin implementing the reconciliation agreement immediately, and allow the CEC in GS to resume its work.<sup>16</sup>

By the end of October 2012, Hamas leader Salah al-Bardawil said that his movement had presented Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi a new paper including mechanisms for implementing the stalled reconciliation with Fatah. Al-Ahmad’s response was to state

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<sup>7</sup> WAFA, 20/5/2012.

<sup>8</sup> Felesteen Online, 29/5/2012.

<sup>9</sup> *Alquds*, 6/6/2012.

<sup>10</sup> Official page of Musa Abu Marzuq, site of Facebook, 25/6/2012,  
<https://ar-ar.facebook.com/mousa.abumarzook>

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 28/6/2012.

<sup>12</sup> PIC, 2/7/2012.

<sup>13</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 11/7/2012.

<sup>14</sup> *Almustaqbal*, 17/7/2012.

<sup>15</sup> Felesteen Online, 3/8/2012.

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 20/9/2012.

that Egypt, after the Muslim Brothers (MB) movement took power there, was no longer qualified to be a reference point and a sponsor for Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation, accusing the administration there of bias for Hamas.<sup>17</sup>

On 7/12/2012, Mish'al made a historical visit to GS, his first in decades, where he promised to achieve reconciliation and end division.<sup>18</sup>

On 17/1/2013, delegations from Fatah and Hamas, sponsored by Egypt, met in Cairo, and agreed to a timetable for the formation of a consensus government, headed by President 'Abbas, by the end of January 2013. An understanding was reached to accomplish reconciliation issues as one package. On 9/2/2013, a meeting of the PLO leadership framework convened. The framework would oversee and approve a new electoral law for the PNC, in addition to forming a CEC in the WB and GS to complete voter registration, providing that a consultation for forming a government begin at the end of February. After that, a presidential decree should be issued; setting the date for presidential, PLC, and PNC elections.<sup>19</sup>

The first fruits of this agreement begin to emerge with a meeting held between Hanna Nasir, chairman of CEC, and Isma'il Haniyyah, on 30/1/2013, followed by agreement on the start of the CEC's work in the GS.<sup>20</sup>

But the march of reconciliation soon fell into disrepair, with no new developments after that save for the solitary meeting held by the PLO framework leadership on 9/2/2013, that produced no substantial results or procedures.

In a post on his Facebook page on 6/5/2013, Abu Marzuq attributed the delay in the implementation of reconciliation to six main reasons, including the absence of political issues on the dialogue agenda, the difference in political programs, Israeli and American vetoes, the Quartet conditions, Fatah's fear of Hamas dominating the PLO, and Abu Mazen's preference of negotiations with Israel over alternative approaches.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 1/11/2012; and *al-Hayat*, 20/11/2012.

<sup>18</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 8/12/2012.

<sup>19</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 18/1/2013.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 31/1/2013.

<sup>21</sup> Official page of Musa Abu Marzuq, Facebook, 6/5/2013.

In May 2013, reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas entered a phase of crisis management, in that it focused on formalities without any concrete results until the last month of 2013. In a new meeting held with Egyptian brokerage, on 15/5/2013, Hamas and Fatah agreed on forming a reconciliation government within three months.<sup>22</sup> On 30/5/2013, the General Freedoms Committee formed following the reconciliation agreement endorsed, at a meeting attended by Fatah and Hamas in Cairo, a pledge by all Palestinian factions to protect public freedoms and stop all forms of politically motivated detentions.<sup>23</sup>

In response to Haniyyah's call for the factions to participate in running GS, made on 26/8/2013, Fatah rejected the initiative, demanding to send a delegate to GS to check on Hamas's implementation of the Cairo Agreement and the Doha Declaration.

When Haniyyah delivered a key political speech on 19/10/2013, calling on Fatah to implement the reconciliation and end the division, Fatah responded through its spokesperson Ahmad 'Assaf, saying that Fatah was willing to implement the reconciliation, but that it was Hamas that was avoiding doing the same.<sup>24</sup> The Fatah spokesperson in GS, Hassan Ahmad, stressed the serious intentions of his movement to end the division. Meanwhile, Sufian Abu Zaida, member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council, highlighted the positive aspects of Haniyyah's speech, and called on President 'Abbas to visit GS to turn the page on the division. In turn, Abu Marzuq denied (on 7/11/2013) Hamas's responsibility for disrupting the reconciliation, pointing at another occasion, on 23/11/2013, that the issue of reconciliation with Fatah was on hold until the expiration of what he called the "false pregnancy," in reference to the negotiations with Israel.<sup>25</sup> On 28/11/2013, Haniyyah said in a meeting with political, community, and academic figures that his government and Hamas were committed to the Cairo and Doha Agreements, calling for the implementation of the reconciliation.<sup>26</sup>

As 2013 was nearing its end, positive developments related to Palestinian reconciliation took place. On 11/12/2013, Haniyyah contacted President 'Abbas, to

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<sup>22</sup> Ma'an, 15/5/2013.

<sup>23</sup> Aljazeera.net, 31/5/2013.

<sup>24</sup> Felesteen Online and Wafa, 19/10/2013.

<sup>25</sup> Official page of Musa Abu Marzuq, Facebook, 7/11/2013; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 23/11/2013.

<sup>26</sup> PIC, 28/11/2013.

discuss the humanitarian situation in GS and ways to achieve reconciliation between the two sides. ‘Abbas also received a similar call from Mish‘al on 14/12/2013 and discussed a number of issues with him, including ways to implement the reconciliation, and the steps required to activate it during the next phase.<sup>27</sup>

There was a climate of optimism when the Haniyyah government released a number of Fatah-affiliated detainees, and allowed members of parliament (MPs) and leaders who had fled during the clashes in 2007 to return to GS. Subsequently, there were accelerated movements in January 2014 involving the two sides. According to well-informed sources, the two parties discussed all issues related to the reconciliation away from the media, in order to form a national reconciliation government. However, the stalling of the reconciliation remains a strong possibility, despite the fact that all Palestinian sides have stressed its importance and necessity. The reconciliation agreement signed on 4/5/2011 did not address the real roots of the division, namely the political and strategic causes related to the two sides’ disparate positions on the Palestinian national choice of armed resistance and its consequences, or the peace process and its consequences. These are diametrically opposed choices and secondary measures are insufficient to address them. Furthermore, the method of implementing the program of reconciliation puts the Israeli (anti-reconciliation) side in control of three out of five axes of the reconciliation: formation of the government, elections and the reform of security forces. These are all issues that Israel can disrupt, and it is impossible to implement related agreements without its consent or silence, especially in the WB.

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<sup>27</sup> WAFA, 11/12/2013 and 14/12/2013.

## **The Developments of 2014–2015**

National reconciliation was the key issue for Palestinians in 2014 and 2015, as it affected their national cause and daily lives. However, the failure of the two main parties to implement reconciliation agreements drove Palestinians to despair over the possibility of ending the division and estrangement between the two. The tone of talk about reconciliation lowered and was soon met with indifference and apathy among the majority of frustrated Palestinians.

Attempts to reach accord between Fatah and Hamas, and all the previous agreements—from the Cairo Accords up to the time of writing—proved that reconciliation in the proposed format was almost impossible to implement. The main reason was that the essence of the division was not addressed directly or clearly. Rather, secondary measures were agreed or escapist solutions reached, such as the formation of a National Consensus Government or beginning preparations for elections, while the essence of division was always the fundamental conflict between the resistance project and the peace process project.

Mahmud ‘Abbas officially declared in League of Arab States (LAS) meetings after the war on GS in 2014, and again in his speech at the GS Reconstruction Conference in Cairo, that there could be no reconciliation except on the basis of:

1. A unified political decision in war and peace.
2. Unified arms.
3. Unified authority.

If the unified political decision here means the decision to negotiate, hold accord, recognize the Oslo Accords and renounce violence, then this is something neither Hamas nor the PIJ or PFLP and other factions would accept. If unified arms mean the exclusivity of arms of the security forces, commitment to security coordination with Israel and the elimination of armed resistance and the uprising, and everything that is classed as violent including stone throwing, stabbings, and so on, then this meant that there would be a disarmament of resistance in GS and handing over of the tunnels and other means of resistance. And if the unified authority means the authority in GS should come under the control and commitments of the most prominent party in the WB, then all the conditions

of Mahmud ‘Abbas for reconciliation entail commitments that cannot be accepted by the resistance forces.

The year 2014 started with a positive climate reigning over the relationship between Fatah and Hamas. An agreement was reached between ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, the Fatah official in charge of the dossier, and Isma‘il Haniyyah, deputy chief of Hamas’s political bureau, to meet and discuss the formation of National Consensus Government and end the division between the WB and GS.<sup>1</sup> The efforts bore fruit in a meeting between Hamas and Fatah delegations on 9/2/2014 at Haniyyah’s home, to draft a plan to implement the reconciliation agreements.<sup>2</sup>

The situation remained the same until 23/4/2014, with the signing of al-Shati’ Agreement following a meeting between a PLO delegation headed by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and a Hamas delegation headed by Haniyyah in the latter’s home in al-Shati’ Refugee Camp. The declaration stipulated the implementation of the reconciliation clauses, first and foremost the formation of a National Consensus Government and convening a committee to activate the PLO within five weeks, followed by legislative, presidential, and national council elections simultaneously within six months of the formation of the government.<sup>3</sup>

At a time when the Palestinian factions and the public welcomed the declaration, Nayef Hawatmeh, DFLP secretary general criticized it, cautioning that the Fatah-Hamas National Consensus Government would be short-lived.<sup>4</sup>

On 28/5/2014, Fatah and Hamas ended their consultations regarding the formation of the government, and agreed to appoint Rami Hamdallah as prime minister. The official declaration of the government took place on 2/6/2014, and its tasks were determined as: reuniting civil and security institutions; the reconstruction of GS; and the restoration of cohesion between the WB and GS, despite some differences between Hamas and the Palestinian presidency.

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<sup>1</sup> Felesteen Online, 10/1/2014.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/11/2014.

<sup>3</sup> Alray News Agency, 23/4/2014.

<sup>4</sup> *Alghad*, 19/5/2014.

A month after the government began its work, the first fundamental difference between Hamas and the government emerged over the issue of civil servants. Hamas rejected the government's decision to make a distinction between previous Fatah-affiliated employees who absconded after the events of 2007 and who were allowed to return to their jobs, and Hamas-affiliated employees who had to undergo legal and administrative reassessment before being paid their salaries. Hamas said this breached the reconciliation agreements.<sup>5</sup>

However, the relationship between Hamas and Fatah and the National Consensus Government took the form of suppressed (and sometimes open) tension after three settlers were killed by resistance fighters (who later turned out to be from Hamas) on 12/6/2014; and after Hamas's battle against the Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 and its insistence on specific conditions to end the fighting.

Although a joint Palestinian delegation from Fatah, Hamas, and other factions was formed to lead ceasefire negotiations in Cairo, the leadership of Fatah especially Mahmud 'Abbas were irritated by Hamas's "monopoly" of the resistance in GS. 'Abbas accused Hamas of establishing a shadow government in GS, which was denied by Hamas, saying his statements undermined national unity.<sup>6</sup>

In an attempt to contain the situation after the end of the war, Fatah formed a special committee to visit GS and engage with Hamas regarding key Palestinian issues including reconciliation. However, no meeting was held until 25/9/2014 in Cairo, where they agreed to resolve outstanding issues, most importantly political partnership, allowing the government to carry out its work in GS, the reconstruction of GS, and pay the salaries of civil servants.

Subsequently, no tangible progress was made regarding the accords' implementation, until November 2014 when Fatah declared its intention to send a high-level delegation to GS to overcome the obstacles especially in light of the return of media bickering. This

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<sup>5</sup> PIC, 1/7/2014; and Alresalah Press, 2/7/2014; and *Alghad*, 6/7/2014.

<sup>6</sup> Quds Press, 29/8/2014.

delegation also went in order to participate in commemorations marking the 10th anniversary of the death of Yasir ‘Arafat.<sup>7</sup>

The efforts were aborted following a series of bombings targeting the homes of Fatah leaders in GS and a stage set up at the ‘Arafat commemoration event on 7/11/2014, prompting Fatah to hold Hamas responsible for the bombings by virtue of its authority over the Strip,<sup>8</sup> despite the latter’s condemnation and call for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.<sup>9</sup> The various Palestinian factions also condemned the bombings.<sup>10</sup>

In response, Khalil al-Hayyeh, Hamas political bureau member, threatened to withdraw confidence from the government, accusing President ‘Abbas of obstructing its work and of treating GS like a remote village.<sup>11</sup> For his part, Muhammad Faraj al-Ghoul, chairman of Hamas’s PLC bloc, said that the government lacked legal and constitutional legitimacy for having failed to secure a vote of confidence in the council.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Hamas Spokesperson Isma‘il Radwan called for the government to be dissolved, accusing it of failing to fulfill its responsibilities towards the people of the GS.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, four factions: PIJ, the PFLP, the DFLP, and PPP, tried to heal the rift between Fatah and Hamas, but to no avail.<sup>14</sup>

Prior the end of the time frame agreed for the National Consensus Government on 2/12/2014, tensions rose again. Musa Abu Marzuq called on Hamas to form a national unity government as an alternative to the existing government, accusing President ‘Abbas of being unable to take the political decisions required to rescue the reconciliation,<sup>15</sup> and denying the presence of a shadow government run by Hamas in GS.<sup>16</sup>

With the beginning of 2015, a wave of optimism came when Rami Hamdallah announced his intention to visit GS, pledging to find solutions to GS’s problems within

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<sup>7</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/11/2014.

<sup>8</sup> Wafa, 6–7/11/2014.

<sup>9</sup> Alray News Agency, 7/11/2014; and PIC, 7/11/2014.

<sup>10</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, 8/11/2014.

<sup>11</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 14/11/2014.

<sup>12</sup> *Alquds* newspaper, 15/11/2014.

<sup>13</sup> Site of Arabi21, 16/11/2014.

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, 17/11/2014; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 17/12/2014.

<sup>15</sup> Felesteen Online, 26/11/2014.

<sup>16</sup> Alray, 8/12/2014.



four weeks.<sup>17</sup> However, a government statement stressed that it would not be able to fulfill its role until it was allowed to fully exercise its powers without factional obstructions in GS. This took things back to square one, prompting Hamas to declare that the statement represented a coup against the reconciliation.<sup>18</sup>

Efforts for reconciliation resumed in early February 2015, after the PLO factions said they would send a delegation to GS to meet with Hamas. However, according to the PFLP, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad hindered those efforts, where a “lobby” inside the PA moved for obstructing reconciliation and marginalizing the GS.

With the return of media bickering and the emergence of unconfirmed rumors regarding the PLO factions sending a delegation to GS, Salah Bardawil, a Hamas leader, accused President ‘Abbas of obstructing the reconciliation and using the PLO to follow narrow political interests.<sup>19</sup>

Before the end of April 2015, the PFLP circulated a detailed memo to the factions in GS that included ideas and a roadmap for ending the division and restoring Palestinian national unity,<sup>20</sup> but there was no response from Fatah and Hamas. However, Isma‘il Haniyyah called on KSA to renew its efforts to end the division and implement the reconciliation.<sup>21</sup> This was rejected by Fatah through Mohammad Shtayyeh, Fatah Central Committee member, and Amin Maqboul, Fatah leader. They said the reconciliation dossier did not need new mediation efforts, and that what was required instead was to just implement the agreements between the two sides, accusing Hamas of attempting to neutralize Egypt by bringing in KSA.<sup>22</sup>

While a total impasse prevailed over the reconciliation dossier, Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri sponsored a joint meeting between Fatah and Hamas in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and proposed an important initiative to push the reconciliation forward, welcomed by both parties.<sup>23</sup> However, mutual accusations shelved the initiative

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<sup>17</sup> PIC, 6/1/2015.

<sup>18</sup> Quds Press, 7/1/2015; and Felesteen Online, 7/1/2015.

<sup>19</sup> Quds Press, 15/4/2015.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 30/4/2015.

<sup>21</sup> Felesteen Online, 1/5/2015.

<sup>22</sup> *Alghad*, 3/5/2015; and *Alittihad*, 3/5/2015; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 4/5/2015.

<sup>23</sup> PIC, 7/5/201; and Sama News Agency, 10/5/2015, <http://samanews.com/ar/>; and *Annahar*, 9/5/2015.

without any practical results. This was followed by a visit by a government delegation to GS led by Ziad Abu Amr, deputy prime minister, to discuss the issues of crossings and civil servants. No agreement was reached.

With the end of the first year of the National Consensus Government in power by June 2015, controversy over the government and the nature of its lineup returned to the fore. Fatah proposed that Hamas form a new national unity government to replace it, prompting Hamas to place three conditions: replacing the prime minister, Rami Hamdallah; not adopting a political program that recognizes Israel; and seeking to implement reconciliation agreements including recognizing the rights of the civil servants appointed by the previous Haniyyah government in GS.<sup>24</sup>

Hamas's position evolved into outright rejection and Khalil al-Hayyeh said it would not join any forthcoming government unless the government and its internal consultations become subject to a comprehensive national dialogue without exceptions.<sup>25</sup> However, in the end President 'Abbas ordered Hamdallah to carry out a cabinet reshuffle, which Hamas considered a coup against reconciliation, stressing it would not recognize the legitimacy of any reshuffle made without consulting Hamas.<sup>26</sup>

The cabinet reshuffle was carried out on 31/7/2015, amid threats by Hamas of not recognizing it and opposition from some Fatah leaders, including 'Azzam al-Ahmad who stated that it was unjustifiable because negotiations for forming a national unity government were ongoing.

Despite the reshuffle, which bypassed Hamas, the movement continued to call for national partnership in all areas, and Khalid Mish'al, head of its political bureau, stressed the importance of democracy and the need to assume national responsibility in light of the challenges facing the Palestinians and Israeli schemes to undermine Palestinian rights.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 24/6/2015.

<sup>25</sup> Site of Alkhaleej Online, 29/6/2015, <http://alkhaleejonline.net>

<sup>26</sup> PIC, 1/7/2015; and Alray News Agency, 12/7/2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Assabeel* newspaper, Amman, 1/9/2015.

Faced with Israeli plans that targeted the spatial and temporal division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in September 2015, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad announced that he had received a mandate from President ‘Abbas to communicate with Hamas to take practical steps towards reconciliation.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Usama Hamdan, a Hamas leader, called on President ‘Abbas to ensure the unification of Palestinian ranks, stressing that reconciliation would help deter the occupation from dividing *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>29</sup>

It seemed that a new crisis was rearing its head on the internal Palestinian scene, when, on 16/8/2015, the Fatah Central Committee adopted a decision calling for the PNC to convene. Mahmud ‘Abbas and nine members of the Executive Committee of the PLO submitted their resignations on 22/8/2015. Wassel Abu Yusuf, member of the Executive Committee, claimed there was a legal vacuum and accordingly the PNC was called to hold an emergency session within a month (14–15/9/2015) to elect a new Executive Committee for the PLO.<sup>30</sup> ‘Abbas also appointed Saeb Erekat secretary of the PLO Executive Committee, after dismissing Yasser Abed Rabbo from this post on 30/6/2015.<sup>31</sup>

Hamas rejected convening of the PNC in this way, which it considered a violation of all national agreements. It considered Abbas’s insistence a violation of national accords and at odds with national cohesion, seeing it as a re-formation of the PLO in accordance with Abbas’s personal and partisan measurements.<sup>32</sup> The PFLP also refused to participate in the session in question, saying that holding a new session of the PNC, whether it is ordinary or exceptional, would deepen the crisis in the Palestinian arena and further protract the division. The PFLP warned against exploiting the council to pass political projects being hatched in Washington and Europe and to return to the negotiations. However, the PFLP said that its decision not to take part in the PNC session did not equate to a withdrawal from the PLO.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Site of The New Arab, 16/9/2015, <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/portal> (in Arabic)

<sup>29</sup> PIC, 21/9/2015.

<sup>30</sup> Aljazeera.net, 22/8/2015, <http://bit.ly/1ScAXrj>

<sup>31</sup> Site of Arabs 48, 4/7/2015, <http://bit.ly/23qv535>

<sup>32</sup> Site of The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), 2/9/2015, <http://hamas.ps/ar/post/3430/>

<sup>33</sup> Aljazeera.net, 8/9/2015, <http://bit.ly/1VkB5pQ>

For their part, the resistance factions in GS, led by Hamas and PIJ, and including the resistance committees, the PFLP-GC, the Ahrar movement, the al-Mujahideen, and al-Saiqah movement, called for a boycott of the PNC meeting, saying the session would damage the prospects for national unity. They stressed the decisions made by the meeting would not be binding for the Palestinian people, and would only represent those taking part in it.<sup>34</sup>

On a related note, a statement made by 70 deputies demanded the convening of the provisional leadership framework of the PLO in accordance with the reconciliation agreements. The deputies said they did not oppose the principle of participating in the PNC or the PLO bodies based on inclusive consensus, but stressed that they were against taking rushed unilateral measures that would lead to further division.<sup>35</sup> Hundreds of academic and independent figures signed another petition calling for postponing the meeting.<sup>36</sup>

Because of the broad objections to the council meeting, President ‘Abbas and the Fatah leadership were forced to withdraw the call for it to convene. On 9/9/2015, PNC Chairman Salim Za‘noun, said the meeting was postponed and launched consultations to hold an ordinary session.<sup>37</sup> This was met with relief and was welcomed by the Palestinian factions.<sup>38</sup>

The chances to achieve reconciliation appeared to be at their lowest by the end of 2015, despite the climate created by the Jerusalem *Intifadah* to bring about internal Palestinian rapprochement in the face of the occupation. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the possibility of the success of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah in the next stage, in light of current information, unless a dramatic change were to occur in the internal Palestinian scene that would push reconciliation forward.

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<sup>34</sup> Ma‘an, 3/9/2015, <https://www.maannews.net/Content.aspx?id=796321>

<sup>35</sup> Aljazeera.net, 8/9/2015.

<sup>36</sup> Aljazeera.net, 9/9/2015, <http://bit.ly/1UXprk9>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> See for example: Aljazeera.net, 9/9/2015, <http://bit.ly/1qkL2Gb>

## **The Developments of 2016–2017**

The most important developments in the internal Palestinian scene and the reconciliation issue during 2016–2017 included the following:

1. Both Fatah and Hamas put their house in order by conducting elections that brought forward new leaderships. Hamas elected a new president, while Fatah kept the same their president and were generally more conservative in implementing change, although some of their old figures have left their positions.

2. Despite the continued attempts to end division, and the various Palestinian, Arab, and international initiatives, at the time of writing, as 2017 comes to a close, there remains no end to the schism.

3. At the end of summer 2017, efforts culminated with Hamas dissolving their administrative committee in GS, then signing the Cairo agreement, which in effect established the Ramallah government's administration of GS.

4. PA and Fatah leaders continue to obstruct the PLC and have not taken any action to achieve an effective partnership in the government and its ministries and institutions, especially in WB.

In general, there remains uncertainty about achieving reconciliation, especially when dealing with the resistance forces' weapons in GS, full national partnership, and the reactivation of the representative institutions of the Palestinian people, particularly the PLO and its institutions. For there is a continued disagreement on several matters, including the peace process and resistance, the national project priorities, the Oslo Accords, and the PA's remit, amongst others.

### **Putting the Palestinian House in Order**

Fatah held its seventh conference on 29/11/2016 and invited other factions to the opening session of the conference. Hamas and PIJ representatives from WB attended the session, at which, Mahmud 'Abbas was re-elected as Fatah's general leader. During the conference, the then Hamas political chief, Khalid Mish'al, sent 'Abbas a letter stressing Hamas' readiness to meet all the requirements of partnership with Fatah, as along with all factions, forces, and political personalities, in the Palestinian national interest.<sup>1</sup> 'Abbas announced at the conference, on 30/11/2016, the platform of the movement for the

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<sup>1</sup> For more see Wafa, 1 and 29/11/2016; and *al-Ayyam*, 28/11/2016; and site of Hamas, 29/11/2016.

coming years. Regarding national reconciliation, ‘Abbas stated: “We need to accomplish [the] reconciliation; there is no alternative to reconciliation between us and our brothers in Hamas. Reconciliation [should be] based on elections; and whoever gets the votes of the people leads the country; [this includes] presidential and legislative elections, as well as [the elections of] the National Council.” On 4/12/2016, at the final session of the conference, election results of the new members of the Fatah’s Central Committee were announced. The closing statement stressed the need to address and end the division in order to achieve national reconciliation, and the need to convene the PNC within a period of three months.<sup>2</sup>

Former Fatah leader in Gaza, Muhammad Dahlan, and his supporters opposed the convening of the movement’s seventh conference because, he said it would dwarf and reduce the movement to fit Abbas’ limited ambitions. A number of Fatah leaders—most of whom had been previously dismissed or suspended—held a press conference in Ramallah on 23/11/2016, where they attacked the seventh conference and described it as a “party”; they also renounced its organizers and stressed their rejection of all its inputs. MP Ashraf Jum‘ah revealed that arrangements were being made to hold another conference for the movement, other than that in Ramallah, which would set up a central committee and a revolutionary council. In addition, MP Na‘imah Sheikh ‘Ali stressed that there would be “no recognition” of the legitimacy of the seventh conference, nor would they commit to any of its outputs and conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the protracted conflict within the Fatah movement between ‘Abbas and Dahlan, ‘Abbas signed a decree suspending four Fatah leaders because of their relationship with Dahlan; Najat Abu Bakr and Na‘imah Sheikh ‘Ali, and members of the Fatah Revolutionary Council ‘Adli Sadiq and Tawfiq Abu Khoussa. On 3/11/2016, the PA terminated the salaries of staff affiliated with Dahlan. In preparation for their interrogation, on 12/12/2016 ‘Abbas waived the parliamentary immunity of five PLC members: Muhammad Dahlan, Shami al-Shami, Najat Abu Bakr, Nasir Jum‘ah and Jamal Tirawi. This came after the Palestinian Constitutional Court had decided, on

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<sup>2</sup> Wafa, 30/11/2016 and 4/12/2016.

<sup>3</sup> For more see site of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 23/10/2016; and Palestinian Press Agency (Safa) and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 23/11/2016; and Felesteen Online, 5/12/2016.

3/11/2016, that the PA president has full authority to waive the immunity of any legislative member, outside council sessions. On 14/12/2016, the Anti-Corruption Court in Ramallah upheld the imprisonment of Dahlan on charges of embezzling more than \$16 million during his tenure as Security Coordinator for the Palestinian Presidency in the era of former President Yasir ‘Arafat. The WB Security Forces arrested a number of Fatah members who participated in a Palestinian youth conference organized by Dahlan in Cairo. ‘Abbas also approved, with the unanimous agreement of the Fatah Central Committee, the permanent suspension of 35 Fatah leaders, including leaders and PLC members who supported Dahlan.<sup>4</sup>

### **Hammas’ Elections and Internal Political Document**

Hammas conducted internal elections in early 2017, to select administrative and leadership bodies at various organizational levels. On 6/5/2017, head of the Political Bureau of Hammas, Khalid Mish‘al, announced that Isma‘il Haniyyah had been elected the new head of Hammas Politburo. Hammas declared, in a statement on 7/5/2017, that they had completed all stages of the elections of its institutions at home and abroad, during which the new head and members of Hammas Politburo were elected. The most notable members emerging were: Musa Abu Marzuq, Yahya al-Sinwar, Saleh al-‘Aruri, Khalil al-Hayya, Muhammad Nazzal, Maher ‘Ubayd, ‘Izzat al-Rishq and Fathi Hammad. On 9/10/2017, the movement announced the election of al-‘Aruri as deputy head of its Politburo. The movement had announced on 13/2/2017 the election al-Sinwar as head of the movement in GS, and Khalil al-Hayya as his deputy, with Rawhi Mushtaha, Mahmud al-Zahhar, Fathi Hammad, Yasir Harb, and Ahmad Kurd, elected members of the movement’s Political Bureau in GS.<sup>5</sup> Maher Salah also took over as Hammas’ leader abroad.

Concurrent with the holding of the movement’s internal elections, on 1/5/2017 in Doha, Khalid Mish‘al announced Hammas’ political document “A Document of General Principles and Policies,” stressing that it reflected general consensus within the

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<sup>4</sup> For more see *Alquds*, 6/8/2016, 6/11/2016 and 14/12/2016; and Felesteen Online, 7/8/2016 and 6/9/2017; *Asharq Alawsat*, 4/11/2016; *al-Ayyam*, 7/11/2016; and *al-Hayat*, 13/12/2016 and 27/2/2017.

<sup>5</sup> For more see site of Hammas, 6–7/5/2017 and 9/10/2017; and Site of Anadolu Agency, 13/2/2017; and *al-Ayyam*, 14/2/2017.

movement. He added that the document was based on a balanced methodology, which combined openness, development, and renewal without prejudice to the fundamentals and rights of the Palestinian people. With regard to national reconciliation, the document, *inter alia*, stated<sup>6</sup>:

- Hamas believes in, and adheres to, managing its Palestinian relations on the basis of pluralism, democracy, national partnership, acceptance of the other and the pursuit of dialogue.
- The PLO is a national framework for the Palestinian people inside and outside of Palestine. It should therefore be preserved, developed and rebuilt on democratic foundations, to secure the participation of all the constituents and forces of the Palestinian people, in a manner that safeguards Palestinian rights.
- It is necessary to build Palestinian national institutions on sound democratic principles, foremost among them, free and fair elections. Such processes should be on the basis of national partnership, in accordance with a clear programme and a clear strategy that adheres to all rights, including the right of resistance, and which fulfils the aspirations of the Palestinian people.
- Hamas affirms that the role of the Palestinian Authority should be to serve the Palestinian people and safeguard their security, their rights and their national project.

### **Reconciliation Course**

Some parties, whether at the Palestinian, Arab-Islamic, or international level, attempted to take part in the Palestinian reconciliation process during 2016–2017. Although most of the initiatives have not achieved any significant breakthrough in the reconciliation issue, they have emphasized that this matter is one of the most important to be addressed to reinvigorate the Palestinian question, and is an essential pathway for national unity in pursuit of the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Some initiatives have been launched at the local Palestinian level to end schism, but they have not been successful, despite the prestige and importance of the parties that

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<sup>6</sup> Site of Hamas, 1/5/2017, <http://hamas.ps/en/post/678>



proposed them. The first of these initiatives was launched on 3/1/2016 by Palestinian factions, Hamas and the PA, to lift the GS siege and resolve the crisis concerning the administration of the Rafah Border Crossing. Despite Hamas' announcement that they had formed a steering committee to follow up with the ideas and proposals presented, 'Abbas accused the movement of not responding to the initiative he had agreed on. Hamas met with a committee of Palestinian factions to discuss the initiative, and welcomed the government's takeover of GS to carry out all its responsibilities, including at the crossing, and stressed that it would be happy with a national committee of Palestinian factions to supervise the crossing. On the other hand, the factions' committee rejected Hamas' proposal, with the Palestinian government saying that Hamas' proposal was "an attempt aimed at procrastination and circumvention."<sup>7</sup>

On 2/2/2016, the PLC launched "a genuine national initiative" to end division; it addressed six issues: the PLO, government formation, the convening of the PLC, elections, all-inclusive reconciliation, and the political program.<sup>8</sup> In April 2016, Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti proposed the "covenant and political partnership document" to unite Palestinians and build a strategic relationship with Hamas. He proposed a ten-point initiative aimed at establishing a strategic relationship with Hamas and an end to internal division. In addition, he called for the commencement of "open, honest, and sincere strategic dialogue between Fatah's Central Committee and Hamas Politburo, by themselves and not through delegates."<sup>9</sup>

In June 2016, reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas entered a new stage; Hamas had announced its positive attitude toward the local elections and, along with the other factions, provided guarantees to ensure their success. The Palestinian government decided to hold the elections on 8/10/2016.<sup>10</sup>

Hamas' decision to participate in the municipal elections in the WB and GS worried the Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*), which anticipated that Hamas' candidates

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<sup>7</sup> For more see the site of huffpostarabi, 3/1/2016; site of Hamas, 5 and 10/1/2015; Wafa, 6/1/2016; site of Xinhua News Agency, 11/1/2016; and *al-Ayyam*, 13 and 17/1/2016.

<sup>8</sup> Alray News Agency, 2/2/2016.

<sup>9</sup> PIC, 18/4/2016.

<sup>10</sup> For more see site of Hamas, 27/6/2016 and 15/7/2016; Wafa, 21/6/2016; PIC, 22/7/2016; and *al-Ayyam*, 18/7/2016 and 25/7/2016.

would win in the majority of municipalities and village councils, thus posing a threat by establishing control over the PA. Alex Fishman wrote in the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper that “political analysts in Israel are predicting a victory for Hamas in the city of Hebron, in the nearby towns and villages, and in southern Mount Hebron area” as well as in Jenin, Nablus, and Qalqilya. Fishman also stated that things were uncertain in Tulkarm, but “negative” surprises should be anticipated.<sup>11</sup> Similar fears were voiced within Fatah.

The CEC decision to write off five lists submitted to participate in the municipal elections in GS, with at least three of them belonging to the Fatah movement, triggered the objection of the Fatah movement. The commission justified the rejection decision by the lack of legal requirements on the part of one or more candidates; based on the Local Authorities’ Councils Election Act No. (10) of 2005 and its amendments. In response, Fatah-affiliated parties appealed the CEC decision at the Supreme Court of Justice, in an attempt to reverse it, while accusing the GS courts of lack of legality in terms of structure and membership.<sup>12</sup>

On 8/9/2016 the Supreme Court of Justice (which is accused by Palestinian parties to be affiliated with Fatah) decided to suspend local elections, pending the adjudication of an appeal filed by five lists previously written off by the CEC. Based on that decision, the Election Commission announced that it had immediately suspended all its local election procedures. On 21/9/2016, the Election Commission announced that the scheduled date to hold local elections on 8/10/2016 had become “inapplicable” after the Supreme Court of Justice approved the request of the Public Prosecutor’s Office, which represents the Palestinian government, to postpone consideration of the case until 3/10/2016 to prepare its defense. Hamas accused the government of disrupting the electoral process; in addition, both Fatah and Hamas accused the other party of undermining the election and excluding candidates. The Israeli expert Yoni Ben-Menachem pointed out that ‘Abbas was under great pressure from Egypt and Jordan to postpone the local elections, fearing the victory of Hamas.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper, 21/8/2016, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4844196,00.html>

<sup>12</sup> Paltoday News Agency, 5/9/2016, <http://paltoday.ps/ar/>

<sup>13</sup> Site of Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 29/8/2016, <http://jcpa.org/egypt-jordan-fear-hamas-victory-west-bank/>; see also site of Hamas, 11 and 13/8/2016 and 21/9/2016; Quds Press, 30/8/2016; Wafa and *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 8/9/2016; *al-Hayat*, 22/9/2016; and Aljazeera.net, 10/9/2016.

On 3/10/2016, the Supreme Court of Justice decided to hold the local elections in WB only. Both Hamas and PIJ, together with the PFLP and DFLP, rejected the decision. In a step, which seemed to be a prelude to holding local elections, the Hamadallah government dissolved several WB municipality councils on 1/11/2016, and approved the formation of committees whose role would be to carry out the tasks of the dissolved local authorities until elections were held.<sup>14</sup> The elections were indeed held on 13/5/2017 in WB only, and were boycotted by Hamas, PIJ, and the PFLP.<sup>15</sup> Voter turnout reached 53.4% in 145 localities. In addition, 181 localities won by acclamation. Complementary elections of 66 localities in WB were held on 29/7/2017, while in GS, local elections scheduled to be held on 14/10/2017 were postponed, pending the availability of appropriate conditions.<sup>16</sup>

On 21/10/2016, PIJ Secretary-General Ramadan ‘Abdullah launched a ten-point initiative aiming to find a way out of the critical situation of the Palestinian question. It started with a proposed announcement by President ‘Abbas abolishing the Oslo Accords, followed by a PLO reconstruction, withdrawal of the recognition of Israel, and a declaration that the Palestinian people are living the “stage of national liberation from occupation, rehabilitation of the resistance, and promotion and development of the *al-Quds Intifadah*.” ‘Abdullah called for a national program that promotes the steadfastness of the people on their land and for “the commencement of a comprehensive national dialogue” between all segments of society to support the new path, as well as ending schism, achieving unity, and formulating a new national program.<sup>17</sup>

In an attempt to oil the wheels of the internal Palestinian atmosphere, the Preparatory Committee of the PNC held a number of meetings at the Palestinian embassy in Beirut on 10–11/1/2017, headed by PNC President Salim al-Za‘nun, with the participation of members of the Executive Committee, in addition to the factions’ secretaries-general, Hamas, PIJ, Sa‘ka Forces (Thunderbolt Forces), and the PFLP-GC. The Committee

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<sup>14</sup> For more see Wafa, site of Central Elections Commission–Palestine, site of Hamas and Felesteen Online, 3/10/2016; and Wafa, 1/11/2016.

<sup>15</sup> For more see Wafa and site of Hamas, 28/2/2017; Felesteen Online, 1/3/2017; site of PFLP, 13/3/2017.

<sup>16</sup> For more see site of Central Elections Commission–Palestine, 14/5/2017; and Wafa and PIC, 30/5/2017; and Wafa, 11/7/2017.

<sup>17</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 22/10/2016.

agreed on the need to hold a national council, to include all the Palestinian forces as set out in the Cairo Declaration 2005, and the Reconciliation Agreement 2011, through elections, and if that was not possible, consensus. The participants agreed on the need to form a national unity government, consolidate institutions, complete the GS reconstruction, and hold presidential, as well as PLC and PNC, elections. The committee called on President ‘Abbas to immediately start consultations with all political forces to form a national unity government. The participants also agreed that the Preparatory Committee would keep holding its meetings periodically, with the participation of all Palestinian forces, until the PNC was held. The committee also requested that al-Za‘nun carry out the necessary procedures to finalize the PNC electoral system.<sup>18</sup>

However, dispute over the formation of a new national unity government hindered the holding of a new Preparatory Committee meeting. Hamas announced its refusal to hold a PNC session to elect an executive committee and a central council for the organization, and to ratify the organization’s political program before the renewal of the PNC. PIJ and PFLP also refused to hold a PNC session in Ramallah. On 12/8/2017, the organization’s executive committee decided to continue consultations to hold a PNC session. In case Hamas and PIJ kept refusing, and to overcome obstacles, new ways to hold the session would be developed. As of mid-October 2017, no new PNC session was held, because the factions requested to continue consultations regarding holding a council session and to work on persuading Hamas to participate.<sup>19</sup>

It seemed that a new crisis was going to engulf the Palestinian scene when the “Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad” was held between on the 25/2/2017 in Istanbul, Turkey, with the participation of six thousand Palestinian. The closing statement of the Conference emphasized the importance of “unity on the basis of commitment to the Resistance program, Palestine National Charter of 1964, and the Palestinian National Covenant of 1968.” Despite the announcement by the head of the Conference’s General Secretariat, Munir Shafiq, that the conference “does not seek to be a substitute for the Palestine Liberation Organization, but aims to rebuild and reconstruct it,” the PLO and

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<sup>18</sup> For more see Wafa, 1 and 10–11/1/2017; and site of Hamas, 4/1/2017; and PIC, 5/1/2017.

<sup>19</sup> For more see *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 6/3/2017; and Anadolu Agency, 10/8/2017; and Wafa, 12/8/2017; PIC, 15/8/2017; and *al-Hayat*, 15–16/8/2017.

Fatah Movement called for the boycotting of the conference because it was “a departure from Palestinian unity”; they also called for the confrontation of anyone who tried to undermine the PLO.<sup>20</sup>

### **Arab and Islamic Initiatives and the Signing of the Cairo Agreement**

Egypt, Qatar, and Turkey have played a crucial role in bringing Fatah and Hamas closer together to reach national reconciliation. In January 2016, Fatah and Hamas held informal meetings in Doha, Qatar and Ankara, Turkey, drafting an informal document outlining a political program for the next phase, and allowing the formation of a government of national unity that would prepare for general elections soon thereafter.<sup>21</sup>

These meetings evolved and came to be sponsored by Qatar. On 7–8/2/2016, Fatah and Hamas met in Doha to discuss mechanisms for implementing reconciliation and to address the obstacles that had so far hindered its achievement. It appeared that all sides had reached a specific practical vision. Member of the Hamas political bureau Musa Abu Marzuq stressed that the prerequisite for the success of national reconciliation would be to isolate the external pressures on any Palestinian agreement, stressing that the decision to implement was in the hands of President ‘Abbas.<sup>22</sup>

During the Qatar round, the parties did not reach a uniform mechanism for the implementation of reconciliation, and each party blamed the other. Major General Jibril Rajoub, deputy secretary of the Fatah Central Committee, said, “I think that what reached us at Fatah does not rise to the level required to end the division.” For his part, Hamas leader Salah al-Bardawil accused the Fatah movement of turning its back on efforts to achieve national reconciliation, holding ‘Abbas fully responsible for this. However, the Fatah Revolutionary Council, convened in March 2016, stressed the need to give the Doha dialogues a sufficient chance to succeed, and saying that Hamas’s “stalling” was pushing Fatah to seek other options to restore control of GS.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quds Press, 25/2/2017; and Anadolu Agency, 26/2/2017 and 1/3/2017; and Wafa, 21/2/2017 and 1/3/2017.

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 29/1/2016.

<sup>22</sup> For more see Wafa, and site of Hamas, 8/2/2016; and PIC, 11/2/2016.

<sup>23</sup> For more see *Alquds*, 24/2/2016; and *Alresalah Press*, 25/2/2016; and *al-Ayyam*, 5/3/2016.

The gradual improvement of the relationship between Egypt and Hamas (which began in the Spring of 2016) reflected positively on the Palestinian reconciliation file. The Sinai security issue was the main pillar that led to this. The year 2016 marked the beginning of a shift in relations, with senior Hamas leaders making frequent visits to Cairo. On 12/3/2016, Hamas discussed with EGID officials in Cairo several issues, foremost of which was the security issue in the Sinai Desert, controlling the GS border, Palestinian reconciliation, and the Rafah crossing. Then visits by Hamas delegations to Cairo were repeated, as the movement stressed its readiness to respond to Egypt's demands regarding border controls, stressing GS would not be a source of any security risks. As for Egypt, it expressed its intention to help push forward Palestinian reconciliation. On 17/5/2016, Egypt's President 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi called on the Palestinians to close ranks and avoid differences. However, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri linked the lifting of the GS siege with the need of the PA to restore its role and control over the GS crossings.<sup>24</sup> But despite these positive Egyptian signs, circumstances were not yet ripe for ending the division.

Doha witnessed a third round of dialogue between Fatah and Hamas on 26/3/2016. However, it passed without positive outcome, due to differences over the political program of the national unity government, and the mechanisms for merging the employees of the previous Hamas government. Hamas leader Usama Hamdan revealed on 26/5/2016, that Fatah had withdrawn from the reconciliation after "objections were raised at a meeting of the Fatah Central Committee against what was agreed upon." But Fatah spokesperson Usama al-Qawasmeh blamed Hamas for the collapse, saying it was "not yet ready for national unity."<sup>25</sup>

Qatar's reconciliation efforts continued, and a fourth round of talks was held on 14/6/2016, which ended in the same way the previous ones. On 18/6/2017, Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri claimed that Fatah was responsible for the failure of the reconciliation talks, accusing the party of backtracking from what had previously been

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<sup>24</sup> For more see Aljazeera.net, 12/3/2016; *Almasryalyoum* newspaper, 30/3/2016; *Al-Ahram* and *Assafir*, 18/5/2016; and WAFSA, 29/6/2016.

<sup>25</sup> For more see *Okaz*, 27/3/2016; and *Alquds*, 28/3/2016; and *The New Arab*, 27/5/2016; and *Arabs* 48 and *al-Ayyam*, 19/6/2016.

agreed on regarding many issues, especially with regard to the issue of civil servants in GS, and the PLC's reactivation.<sup>26</sup>

On 18/6/2016, Jibril Rajoub, a member of Fatah's delegation in the talks, played down the importance of two issues; the civil servants and PLC reactivation, stressing the need to form a national unity government and to hold elections three months later.<sup>27</sup>

On 27/10/2016, Qatar yet again attempted to give fresh impetus to the reconciliation talks. It gathered both 'Abbas and Mish'al for a lunch hosted by Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin 'Abdulrahman Al Thani. The two parties stressed the importance of completing the reconciliation. 'Abbas stressed the necessity of achieving national reconciliation and eliminating the causes of division by forming a government of national unity and holding elections. Hamas said that the leadership of the movement had presented 'Abbas with a comprehensive vision for reconciliation. It stressed the adherence to the principle of national partnership in various positions, responsibilities and decisions, through a government of national unity, as well as both the PLC, and PLO. But on 15/11/2016, Musa Abu Marzuq revealed that reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas had stalled and that 'Abbas had insisted on his conditions for reconciliation during the meeting in Doha with Hamas.<sup>28</sup>

Qatar tried to support reconciliation efforts by offering a grant of \$31 million to pay the salaries of Hamas-appointed staff after the split for July 2016, covering 23,800 civilian civil servants.<sup>29</sup>

In 2017, relations continued to improve between Hamas and Egypt, which reflected positively on Palestinian reconciliation talks. The Vice President of the Political Bureau and Hamas leader in GS Isma'il Haniyyah held a meeting with EGID Head Major General Khalid Fawzy, on 23/1/2017, during which he discussed future of relations with Egypt during the next phase, in addition to the issue of reconciliation.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For more see *al-Sharq*, 13/6/2016; and PIC, 18/6/2016.

<sup>27</sup> *Al-Ayyam*, 19/6/2016.

<sup>28</sup> Wafa and site of Hamas, 27/10/2016; and *The New Arab*, 16/11/2016.

<sup>29</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 3/8/2016.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 24/1/2017

## The Administrative Committee and Abbas's Measures

The Palestinian internal crisis entered a new phase on 16/3/2017 after Hamas deputies in GS approved the amendments to the Law on the Administrative Committee, which would be entrusted with the functions of managing governmental institutions in GS. Deputy PLC Speaker Ahmed Bahr said that the Administrative Committee was a temporary body, designed to discharge caretaker duties and serve the citizens in light of the abdication by the government of Hamdallah of its tasks. Musa Abu Marzuq pointed out that the Committee would be dissolved automatically as soon as the government fulfilled its obligations. The PA responded on 27/4/2017 with a series of measures that included requesting the Israeli side to stop charging it for Gaza's electric consumption. President 'Abbas also issued a decree on 6/5/2017 exempting GS residents from paying taxes and service fees.<sup>31</sup>

On 4/4/2017, the Hamadallah government stopped paying work allowances to public sector employees in GS. According to the head of the public employees' union in GS, 'Aref Abu Jarad, the PA forced approximately 11 thousand military personnel in to early retirement. On 4/6/2017, the PA stopped paying the salaries of 277 former prisoners, and on 4/7/2017, it transferred 6,145 employees in GS to early retirement. The salaries of 37 deputies of the Change and Reform bloc in WB for the month of June 2017 were officially suspended. Deputy PLC Speaker Ahmed Bahr commented that 'Abbas cutting of Hamas deputies' salaries in WB, undermined the Palestinian Basic Law and sought to disrupt the PLC and monopolize the Palestinian political decision making process. He considered the measure a declaration of war against the PLC and its deputies. However, on 14/8/2017, 'Abbas decided to reinstate salaries for freed prisoners in WB only, whereas Hamdallah later decided, on 26/8/2017, to allow health and education workers who were recently retired in GS, to continue working in their ministries, to provide services to citizens there.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For more see *al-Quds al-Arabi* 17/3/2017; Felesteen Online, 21/3/2017; site of Hamas and Wafa, 12/4/2017; *al-Hayat*, 28/4/2017; *al-Ayyam*, 5/5/2017; and Wafa and Paltoday, 6/5/2017.

<sup>32</sup> For more see Wafa, 4/4/2017, 4/7/2017, and 26/8/2017; and Alresalah Press, 16/5/2017; and Sama News Agency, 4/6/2017 and 16/7/2018; PIC and The New Arab, 9/7/2017; and Aljazeera.net, 10/7/2017; and Felesteen Online 15/8/2017.



As a result of the PA's actions, on 10/9/2017, spokesperson for the Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip, Ashraf al-Qudra, reported that 40% of all basic medical supplies and medicines were depleted in Gaza hospitals. He said that 30 patients had died due to the measures of the PA in Ramallah, and that 3,000 patients needed to undertake urgent travel to the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948, or to Egypt, to complete essential treatment.<sup>33</sup>

In June, Israel began cutting the electricity supply to GS by more than a quarter, after the PA reduced its electricity payments. Minister of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) Mohammed Shtayyeh also rejected Egypt's facilitation of diesel supply to GS, because of Hamas' understandings with Egypt and Hamas' understanding with Dahlan.<sup>34</sup>

In this climate, relations and contacts between Dahlan and Hamas intensified in June 2017. Meetings were held in Cairo, where Egypt played a key role. Hamas wanted to achieve a real breakthrough and lift the GS siege, following the increased pressures and punitive measures imposed by 'Abbas. Mahmud al-Zahhar said that the understandings with Dahlan focused on three issues, namely the PLC activation, communal reconciliation, and the activation of the National Islamic Solidarity Committee with projects that benefit the poor. Confirming the talks, Dahlan, addressed a PLC session in Gaza via video, saying "We have made joint efforts with our brothers in Hamas that have enabled us to restore hope to the heroic people of Gaza."<sup>35</sup> The talks between Hamas and Dahlan's Fatah Reformist and Democratic Party, included the issue of control over the Rafah crossing, where one of the latter's leaders, Sufian Abu Zaida stated on 10/8/2017 that closer relations with Egypt were a positive development, pointing out that this could improve the chances of opening the Rafah crossing.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Felesteen Online, 20/8/2017; and official Facebook page of the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza Strip, [https://www.facebook.com/MOHGaza1994/?hc\\_ref=ARQ7Ax89-SEb9WXt0kh4ysezoc8XM9rb\\_GhAjTfhosqr2rAS2MWzpQ-s\\_sypg4L4kc&fref=nf](https://www.facebook.com/MOHGaza1994/?hc_ref=ARQ7Ax89-SEb9WXt0kh4ysezoc8XM9rb_GhAjTfhosqr2rAS2MWzpQ-s_sypg4L4kc&fref=nf)

<sup>34</sup> For more see The New Arab, 12/6/2017; and *al-Hayat*, 20/6/2017; and *Asharq Alawsat*, 21/6/2017; and *Safa*, 10/7/2017. See also *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper, 12/6/2017.

<sup>35</sup> For more see Sama News Agency, 10/6/2017 and 13/6/2017; *Alghad*, 13/6/2017 and 14/7/2017; and *Alquds*, 27/7/2017

<sup>36</sup> *Alquds*, 10/8/2017

These contacts caused great concern for ‘Abbas and the Fatah leadership, which feared that Dahlan would use the GS as an outlet to try to regain his influence in Fatah and the Palestinian interior. It also provoked a wave of objections within Hamas, in the ranks of those who remember Dahlan’s negative role in creating the Palestinian schism, as well as his hostility towards the Islamic movements in the Arab world and his attempts to suppress them. However, Abbas’s bid to contain the matter through his contacts with the Egyptian leadership, Hamas’s limited contacts with Dahlan, and Dahlan’s failure to make a real difference in terms of easing the suffering of Gaza and lifting the siege, reined in the influence of Dahlan and restored contact between Hamas and ‘Abbas, helped by an Egyptian push to achieve a real breakthrough in the reconciliation issue.

### **Cairo Agreement October 2017**

*Al-Hayat* newspaper reported on 6/8/2017 that Egyptian president Sisi had put forward an initiative to end the Palestinian division when he met ‘Abbas in Cairo on 9/7/2017, and that both ‘Abbas and Hamas had agreed to it. ‘Abbas later presented an alternative initiative which was subsequently rejected by Hamas as outdated.<sup>37</sup>

Progress in reconciliation was made when a delegation of the Fatah Central Committee headed by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad arrived in Cairo, on 15/9/2017, to discuss the latest developments in reconciliation with a Hamas delegation led by Isma‘il Haniyyah, who was already there. Another sign of a breakthrough on this issue came when Hamas, on 17/9/2017, dissolved the Administrative Committee in GS, which was formed on 16/3/2017, calling on the government of national accord to come to GS, to exercise its functions and carry out its duties immediately. Hamas stressed it was ready to agree on mechanisms for the implementation of the Cairo Agreement of 2011 and its annexes. For his part, Dahlan welcomed the agreement reached to end the Palestinian division and declared that he was ready to reconcile with ‘Abbas to unify Fatah. “The ball is in Abu Mazen’s court and whenever he wants [to meet] we are ready,” he said.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Al-Hayat*, Wafa, and Quds Press, 6/8/2017.

<sup>38</sup> For more see *Alquds*, 15/9/2017; site of Hamas, 17/9/2017; and Reuters, 4/10/2017.

On 1/10/2017, an Egyptian security delegation arrived in GS, as part of Cairo's efforts to complete the reconciliation understandings. On 12/10/2017, the Fatah and Hamas delegations officially signed the reconciliation agreement in Cairo, in the presence of Egyptian EGID Head Major General Khalid Fawzy, 'Azzam al-Ahmad, head of the Fatah delegation, and Saleh al-'Aruri, deputy head of the Hamas political bureau and head of the Hamas delegation to Cairo. Al-'Aruri stressed that the two movements were committed to the reconciliation agreements signed in Cairo in 2011, indicating that they did not enter into new agreements. 'Azzam al-Ahmad also stressed that they had agreed on empowering the government and restoring Palestinian legitimacy in GS, as well as the government's full supervision over all crossings. He announced that the presidential guard would be deployed along the Egyptian border.<sup>39</sup>

Yet despite Hamas's decision to dissolve the Administrative Committee in the Gaza Strip and the signing of the reconciliation agreement on 12/10/2017, at the time of writing the PA has not yet stopped the punitive measures it has been taking against GS. One analysis of this is that the PA was behaving like a victor, seeing Hamas's initiatives towards reconciliation as the fruits of these pressures. Thus, 'Abbas declared that he was not in a hurry to reverse the latest punitive measures he had taken against GS. He explained that the latest measures would not be lifted until the government were given full control of the crossings, ministries, and security forces in GS. The national accord government also announced the postponement of lifting the punitive measures on GS.<sup>40</sup>

On 15/10/2017, Fatah Central Committee also refused to discuss the lifting of the GS sanctions, despite welcoming the reconciliation agreement. Fatah Central Committee member Hussein al-Sheikh stressed that the real test of ending the division lay in the comprehensive and complete empowerment of the government in GS as well as the WB. The Palestinian factions denounced this delay in lifting the sanctions, while Hamas said the failure to reverse arbitrary measures against the population of GS was unjustified.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For more see *Asharq Alawsat*, 2/10/2017; and Alray News Agency, 10/10/2017; and site of Hamas and Wafa, 12/10/2017.

<sup>40</sup> For more see Arabs 48, Wafa, Aljazeera.net, and Felesteen Online, 3/10/2017.

<sup>41</sup> For more see Wafa, 15/20/2017; and *al-Ayyam* and *al-Hayat*, 17/20/2017.

In 2016 and 2017, PA security forces in WB did not stop pursuing activists. According to the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK, 2,214 Palestinian citizens were arrested and summoned in WB in 2016. A report by the same organization also noted that the WB security forces arrested 1,011 Palestinians during the first nine months of 2017.<sup>42</sup>

### **International Initiatives**

At the international level, the Swiss helped towards achieving Palestinian reconciliation, as announced by Fatah leader ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, on 25/4/2016. Switzerland and some other European countries offered assistance to resolve the issue of GS civil servants appointed by Hamas after its takeover of GS in mid-2007. Isma‘il Haniyyah stated that Paul Garnier, head of the Swiss liaison office in Ramallah, had informed him of the intention of his country to hold a conference on internal Palestinian reconciliation.<sup>43</sup>

Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Sha‘ath said that the Swiss paper, aimed to integrate civil servants in GS, would seek “to reduce the financial cost of government operations through an early retirement package, and make an additional one-time payment for pre-2007 staff, and a one-time payment and insurance package to staff appointed after June 2007.”<sup>44</sup>

A round of dialogue was held on 13/1/2017, sponsored by the Russian state, where Fatah, Hamas, PIJ and other Palestinian factions held a three-day meeting in Moscow. Later, an announcement was made by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and Musa Abu Marzuq that consultations had been launched to form a government of national unity, to be followed by a meeting of the PNC and legislative elections.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> For more see site of Hamas, 4/2/2017; and the site of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK.

<sup>43</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 26/4/2016, and Felesteen Online, 11/5/2016.

<sup>44</sup> Site of Al-Monitor, 27/5/2016

<sup>45</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18/1/2017.