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Following the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation, Hamas may maneuver between adherence to its fundamental positions and its desire to benefit from the agreement which may serve its internal political and media purposes



Left: The signatures of senior Hamas figures and the PLO-Fatah delegation (Fatah's official Facebook page, April 23, 2014). Right: Senior Fatah and Hamas figures after they signed the agreement. Left to right: Azzam al-Ahmad (Fatah), Ismail Haniya, head of the de-facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, and Musa Abu Marzouq, deputy chairman of the Hamas political bureau (Filastin Al-'Aan, April 23, 2014).

Overview

1. The reconciliation agreement signed with Fatah on April 23, 2014, poses for Hamas the **basic problem** familiar from the past regarding its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

A. **On the one hand**, at least at this juncture, Hamas has an interest in promoting the implementation of the agreement and not appearing as trying to undermine it. It also does not want to provide Israel – which blames the Palestinian Authority for the failure of the negotiations – with ammunition for the media. In addition, Hamas wants to exploit the agreement to improve its international image, the economic conditions in the Gaza Strip and its relations with Egypt, as well as to repel claims of its terrorist nature.

B. **On the other**, Hamas has no intention of changing its basic rigid ideological positions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, at the center of which is its refusal to recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist and regarding terrorism (the so-called "resistance") as the leading strategy for advancing Palestinian interests.

2. The Hamas leadership had to deal with problems similar to those of the two previous internal Palestinian reconciliation agreements, one in **Cairo** (May 4, 2011) and the other in **Doha** (February 6, 2014). Hamas previously overcame the dilemma by presenting a "flexible" attitude to the West and the PA and at the same time making it clear to the Palestinian street that even after the internal Palestinian reconciliation **Hamas would not change any aspect of its positions** (For an analysis of statements made by senior Hamas figures after the Cairo agreement was signed and which may be relevant to the current situation, see the Appendix.). **However, past experience has shown that as time passes and the agreements may dissolve, Hamas' rhetoric becomes more strident, it clings more firmly to its basic rigid positions.**

3. So far Hamas spokesmen stress their **common denominator with PA, sometimes manipulatively** for their own benefit:

A. **Salah al-Bardawil**, a senior Hamas figure, praised the speech given by Mahmoud Abbas at the PLO's Central Council on April 26, 2014. He said that Mahmoud Abbas's recognition of the failure of the negotiations with Israel (which he claimed was reflected by the speech) was a good beginning for "strengthening national unity." He also praised Mahmoud Abbas' refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state, his opposition to construction in the settlements and his adherence to the "right of return." However, he added that **"Hamas does not and will not recognize Israel"** (Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Mayadeen TV, Lebanon, April 26, 2014).¹

B. **Fawzi Barhoum and Bassem Naim**, both Hamas spokesmen, also praised what they represented as Mahmoud Abbas' admission that the negotiations had failed, his adherence to Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state and his refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state (Facebook page of Fawzi Barhoum,

¹ **Salah al-Bardawil** and other Hamas spokesmen make a clear distinction between their refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state (part of the internal Palestinian consensus) and not recognizing the right of the State of Israel to exist (which is Hamas' position but not the PA's).

April 26, 2014; remark by Bassem Naim, foreign affairs advisor to Ismail Haniya, Agence France-Presse April 26,2014).

C. Taher al-Nunu, Ismail Haniya's media advisor, strongly denied a remark attributed to him by the Washington Post, according to which Hamas intended to recognize Israel (Quds.net, April 27, 2014). **He said Hamas would never recognize Israel.** Hamas' international spokesman **Hossam Badran** also rejected the idea that Hamas had any intention of "recognizing so-called Israel." He said that recognizing "the legitimacy of the Zionists" was something that was to be rejected and not even discussed (Facebook page of Hossam Badran, April 27, 2014).

4. At this point, as far as is known to the ITIC, Hamas spokesmen have not yet mentioned the armed struggle (the so-called "resistance") because they are aware of the publicly stated differences of opinion between the PA and Hamas. However, it is a key issue and in the future can be expected to arise, both in internal Palestinian forums where Hamas may be expected to explain itself (for example, in response to accusations that Hamas has abandoned its path) and in support of terrorist attacks which may be carried out from the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria.

Appendix

Remarks made by senior Hamas figures after the signing of the internal Palestinian reconciliation in Cairo, May 4, 2011, a case study for presenting a moderate countenance while stressing a rigid basic positions

Overview

1. On April 23, 2014, in the Gaza Strip, Fatah and Hamas delegations signed an internal Palestinian reconciliation agreement. It was based on the commitment of both sides to implement the articles agreed on in Cairo on May 4, 2011 and Doha on February 6, 2012. They include the formation of a government of national agreement (called by Mahmoud Abbas, "a government of technocrats") within five weeks; elections held simultaneously for the presidency, the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestinian National Council no later than six months from the formation of the government; renewal of the activities of the "social reconciliation committee" and the "freedom committee" which deals, among other things, with the mutual release of prisoners and permission for Fatah political activity in the Gaza Strip and Hamas political activity in Judea and Samaria; and appointing a committee that will deal with the reorganization of the PLO.

2. Following the May 4, 2011 signing of the internal Palestinian reconciliation agreement, senior Hamas figures made statements meant to present a pragmatic image to the West and an attitude of reconciliation toward the Palestinian Authority. However, in the same breath, Hamas political bureau head Khaled Mashaal and other senior figures said **that even after the reconciliation agreement, Hamas had not abandoned its rigid fundamental positions regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.**

3. In official statements made after the Cairo agreement, senior Hamas figures made it clear **that they regarded themselves as integrated into the decision-making process regarding political issues** during the term of the interim government set up within the framework of the reconciliation agreement.² **They also emphasized that**

² **Mahmoud Abbas** said in a speech before the PLO's Central Council on April 26, 2014, that the unity government would be "a government of technocrats" that would deal with internal issues and that the

Hamas would adhere to the path of "resistance" [i.e., terrorism], although they were prepared to reach an agreement with Fatah/the PA regarding how the "resistance" should be conducted. They repeatedly emphasized that Hamas rejected recognizing Israel (even if a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders were established), and that it would not accept decisions made by the International Quartet, which, they claimed, was no longer relevant now that the internal Palestinian reconciliation agreement had been signed.

4. However, in order not to be regarded as sabotaging the reconciliation agreement, they also said that they would not oppose the Palestinian Authority's political move (at the time) in the United Nations leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. **That would be on the condition that it was not accompanied by recognition of Israel or the waiving of the Palestinian refugees (so-called) "right of return."** Therefore, they would enable the Palestinian Authority to carry out its **UN move in September 2011**, even if they did not believe in it ("empty rhetoric," "a political circus"). They also said they would be willing to reach an agreement about how the "resistance" should be conducted, including maintaining a lull in the fighting in the Gaza Strip, although they had no intention to abandon the path of "resistance" [i.e., terrorism and violence].

5. The following are statements made by Khaled Mashaal, head of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus, and other senior Hamas figures regarding various aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Authority to make decisions regarding the conflict with Israel

6. Interviewed by Egypt's Nile TV on May 9, 2011 **Khaled Mashaal** said that during the term of the interim government, which would last a year, **not only Mahmoud Abbas and his aides would be responsible for political decisions, but also a "temporary leadership body" as well** [i.e., Hamas regards itself as integrated into the temporary leadership within the decision-making process].³

negotiations were a matter for the PLO, which represented the entire Palestinian people. His position may be considered problematic by Hamas, which regards itself as **part of the leadership that made the decisions**. It is possible that both sides may try to avoid or obscure the potential landmine.

³ Khaled Mashaal also said it had been agreed with Mahmoud Abbas in Egypt to determine a date when the two sides would meet to establish, among other things, a "temporary leadership" for the Palestinian people (Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV, May 9, 2011).

7. Khaled Mashaal added that he was aware that during the interim period many obstacles would have to be overcome by both sides. He said he hoped the atmosphere of reconciliation would make it possible to make decisions through national unity without external interference and "intrigues."

Adherence to the path of terrorism ("resistance") but readiness to discuss how to conduct it

8. During the May 9, 2011 interview with Nile TV, Khaled Mashaal said that **Hamas' ideology was based on "resistance," from which it took its name** (Hamas is the acronym in Arabic of "Islamic resistance movement"). He said Hamas believed that **"resistance" [i.e., terrorism] was a "legitimate right"** and claimed that **there was no disagreement about "the principle of resistance" within the Palestinian arena.** However, he added that **implementing the principle**, determining its forms [i.e., the types of terrorist attacks] and timing, and the question of whether to choose a lull in the fighting or escalation, **were all decisions which would be made by "national Palestinian decision."** In any event, **in the past Hamas had applied the "principle of resistance" and would continue to do so in the future, until the "occupation" [i.e., Israel] came to an end** (Nile TV, May 9, 2011).

9. Interviewed by Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV, Khaled Mashaal **repeated the claim that the Palestinian people did not disagree about the "resistance."** He said that there might be differences of opinion between Fatah and Hamas about how to conduct the "resistance" [i.e., about methods of carrying out terrorist attacks], **but it had to be remembered that both movements had been born of weapons ["born from a rifle"]** and those kinds of disagreements were only "natural" for an occupied people. He added that Fatah was currently asking how they could make the resistance strike roots in the future. Asked if he agreed [with Fatah] to formulate a policy of "non-violence" toward Israel, **he said that Hamas had emphasized the importance of all forms of "resistance" to both Fatah and the media.** However, he added, for the sake of reconciliation and national unity, **Fatah and Hamas had agreed to discuss ways of conducting the "resistance"** (Hamas' Al- Aqsa TV, May 9, 2011).

10. Interviewed by The Wall Street Journal, Khaled Mashaal repeated Hamas' strict adherence to the "resistance." However, he said, Fatah and Hamas now had to agree on how to conduct it: **"How to manage the resistance, what's the best way to achieve our goals, when to escalate and when to cease fire, now we have to**

agree on all those decisions as Palestinians" (Wall Street Journal Online, May 7, 2011) (ITIC emphasis). In addition, **Mahmoud al-Zahar, senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip**, said that **the current lull in the fighting did not contradict the principle of "resistance."** He said that the lull in the fighting with Israel was part of a "resistance program" and was not a deviation from it. **Having a lull**, he said, **did not mean "choosing peace"** (Ma'an News Agency website, May 11, 2011).

Hamas is ready to give the Palestinian Authority an opportunity to promote its September 2011 UN move

11. Mahmoud **al-Zahar**, speaking of the Palestinian Authority move in the UN in September 2011 plan to declare a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, said that based on past experience, **Hamas was not pinning its hopes on the outcome. He said it was all "empty rhetoric" and "a political circus."** He said he wondered what the state would be founded on, what is territory would be, and if it would include residents of both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. **He also said he wondered what the fate of the five million Palestinian refugees who lived abroad would be and if "we will lose the right of return"** (Ma'an News Agency website, May 11, 2011).

12. Khaled Mashaal was asked **if Hamas would give the new arrangement a chance** [i.e., the Palestinian Authority UN move]. He said that the 20 years since the Madrid Middle East peace conference had proved that "Israel does not deserve another chance to prove itself..." **As far as Hamas was concerned, the movement did not have "to try Israel again,"** but if the Palestinians or Arab countries wanted to give Israel another chance, **Hamas was ready to make it possible, for a limited time, for the sake of Palestinian interests and the success of the Palestinian reconciliation** (Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV, May 9, 2011).

13. At a meeting with delegations of the "youth of the Egyptian revolution" Khaled Mashaal said that for the sake of the Egyptian revolution and the internal Palestinian reconciliation, **Hamas was prepared to give an extension of one year to examine Israel's intentions.** The objective the Palestinian UN move had to achieve during that time was **the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital** (Russian news agency RIA Novosti, May 10, 2011).

14. Interviewed by the London-based Al-Sharq al-Awsat on May 9, 2011 Khaled Mashaal again stated that **the Palestinians would give Israel "a last chance."** He

called on the Palestinians and the Arab world to formulate a new strategy which was not a declaration of war on Israel, but rather the addition of **"bargaining chips"** (available to the Palestinian Authority). They would include, he said, the **"resistance"** [i.e., terrorism], **"popular action,"** such as the steps taken against the so-called "separation fence," and **persecuting Israel everywhere and using boycotts to attack it. He said the Palestinians had "a golden opportunity to persecute Israel, which is hostile to peace"** (a thinly veiled reference to encouraging the campaign to delegitimize Israel, one of whose main aspects is boycotts).

Rejecting the conditions of the International Quartet

15. Hamas spokesman **rejected the conditions of the International Quartet,** according to which Hamas must recognize Israel and abandon terrorism. **They claimed that the conditions were no longer relevant after the Palestinian reconciliation** and said that only pressure, not negotiations, would cause Israel to withdraw from the territories, and that the focal point of the pressure was the "resistance" [i.e., terrorism]. **The Hamas spokesmen emphasized (with regard to the Quartet's conditions) that they would not abandon the "resistance" [i.e., terrorism] nor would they recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist.**

16. Senior Hamas figure Osama Hamdan said that on no condition would Hamas recognize **"the Zionist entity"** nor would it compromise on the **"resistance"** [i.e., violence and terrorism]. He claimed that **the armed "resistance" needed to be complemented by political and public efforts** and the formulation of "a regional resistance culture" which would complement that of the Palestinians. He added that the International Quartet was no longer united and **he rejected a return to negotiations with Israel, which, he said, had turned into a joke** (Hamas' Palestine-info website, May 5, 2011). **Khalil al-Hayeh, a member of Hamas' political bureau,** said Hamas was "a fighting resistance movement" whose objective was **"to liberate Palestine [sic]"** (Al-Quds TV, May 4, 2011).

17. Senior Hamas figure Salah al-Bardawil said that **the International Quartet's conditions were irrelevant now that the reconciliation agreement had been signed.** He claimed that the conditions were "rulings" which had been imposed in the Palestinian people in an attempt to wipe out the "resistance" [i.e., terrorism], which he called the Palestinians' "natural right" (Al-Aqsa TV, May 4, 2011).

18. Interviewed by Reuters in Cairo on May 8, Khaled Mashaal said that **recognition of Israel could only be examined after the establishment of an independent state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip**. He added the international community, especially the Europeans and Americans, had to respect the Palestinian decision, which was an internal issue, and **could not impose conditions on them**. He said that **the international community had to exert pressure on Israel and not the other way around. Israel, he said, needed pressure**. It was, he claimed, an occupier, that would not get out by being convinced or through dialogue. **He said it would withdraw [from the PA territories] only under pressure and constraints**.

19. In the same Reuters interview, Khaled Mashaal was asked if Hamas were willing to recognize Israel as part of a viable agreement [one of the International Quartet's conditions]. He answered, **"First allow the Palestinian people to live on their lands freely ... to establish their independent state ... then ask the Palestinian people, its government and leaders about their position towards Israel"** (Reuters, May 8, 2011).

20. **While the reconciliation agreement was being initialed, Musa Abu Marzouq, deputy head of the Hamas political bureau, said that the International Quartet's conditions were not included in the agreement because the Quartet had "disappeared along with its decisions, and were no longer taken into consideration" by the Palestinians** (Al-Jazeera TV, April 27, 2011). On another occasion he said that **"Hamas does not recognize Israel"** and called on the international community to **reexamine Israel's right to exist** (Al-Hayat, May 1, 2011).

21. **Ismail Haniya, head of the de facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, lauded the reconciliation agreement, claiming it reflected the "political desires" of the Palestinian leadership, especially those of the Hamas administration and movement. He called on the PLO "to completely withdraw its recognition of Israel" because "the existence of Israel is fundamentally illegitimate."** He added that "Israel's positions arouse disgust" and caused much suffering for the Palestinian people (Hamas' Al-Aqsa TV, April 29, 2011).