



April 5, 2015

## Initial Hamas Reactions to the Long-Term Lull Proposal in Return for Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and Lifting the Siege



The beginning of an article by Dr. Faysal Abu Shamala, a Hamas-affiliated journalist. The article is entitled "Why do you object to a hudna [ceasefire] with Gaza?" (Facebook page of Faysal Abu Shamala, March 23, 2015). It appeals to Hamas to agree to a long-term lull in the hostilities with Israel and attacks the Palestinian Authority for its objection to the proposal.

### Overview

1. In March 2015 the Hamas media reported that Hamas had recently received a proposal for a long-term lull in the hostilities with Israel (as long as five years) in return for reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and lifting the siege (on several occasions Hamas figures referred to a ceasefire, *hudna*). According to Hamas spokesmen, the proposal was made by "European diplomats" (according to another Hamas spokesman's version, its source was Robert Serry, the United Nations special coordinator for the Middle East peace process).
2. **Hamas has not yet given its official response but its spokesmen have not rejected it outright.** They claim the proposal is under consideration but a decision will have to be a "comprehensive national consensus," made by all the organizations operating in the Gaza Strip (For a summary of Hamas reactions to the proposal, see **Appendix A**). **The Palestinian Authority (PA) has also not formally responded to**

**the proposal**, but its media reported that Mahmoud Abbas was worried the agreement would be accepted by Hamas without full Palestinian compliance (Palestinefree.com, March 29, 2015).

3. An exceptional reaction to the proposal was made by **Dr. Fayez Abu Shamala**, a Palestinian academic and journalist from the Gaza Strip who is **affiliated with Hamas**. He posted an article on his Facebook page called "Why do you object to a *hudna* [ceasefire] with Gaza?" (March 23, 2015). He appealed to the Hamas leadership to adopt an independent political policy and **promote an agreement with Israel for a long-term ceasefire [*hudna*], lasting as long as five years and possibly longer**. He also strongly criticized the PA which, he said, objected to the proposal while maintaining a ceasefire with Israel itself. **He also proposed an alternative to the cessation of terrorist attacks from the Gaza Strip**: a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, he said, **"must be the starting point for an armed resistance in the West Bank, in Nablus, Hebron, Jenin and the Jordan Valley..."** (For the main points of the article, see Appendix B).

## Possible Considerations for Hamas regarding a Long-Term Lull in the Hostilities

4. Hamas will probably view a long-term ceasefire with Israel in return for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip as **having several advantages**:

- 1) Such an agreement can lead to **long-term security stability** in the Gaza Strip, which will support the reconstruction process. Reconstruction is currently **proceeding slowing**, engendering anger and frustration among the Gazans, emotions which may eventually be directed against Hamas.
- 2) Such an agreement can strengthen the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip by **making progress in a number of projects which, since the end of Operation Protective Edge, Hamas has so far failed to move forward** (such as opening the Rafah crossing, constructing a sea port and an airport). Because of the hostile relations between Hamas and Egypt, it will be difficult for Hamas to promote those projects with Egyptian mediation (as discussed at the end of Operation Protective Edge).
- 3) A long-term lull in the hostilities **will give Hamas a timeout to rebuild the military-terrorist capabilities damaged during Operation Protective Edge** (and the military capabilities of other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip as well)

4) A long-term lull in the hostilities can ease Hamas' strategic distress and **strengthen it in relation to the PA, contribute to improving its relations with Egypt and provide it with political benefits from the international community.**

5) For Hamas, a long-term lull in the Gaza Strip **does not mean ending the "resistance"** [i.e., terrorism], which is unacceptable for Hamas. However, Hamas **can move the "resistance" [i.e., terrorist attacks] to Judea and Samaria**, where it can even increase the number of terrorist attacks it orchestrates.

5. **However, a long-term lull agreement also has significant problems (of which Hamas should be aware) which can make it difficult both to achieve and implement: militants in Hamas and in the other terrorist organizations** in the Gaza Strip may object to such an agreement and try to sabotage it (Hamas, as has been shown in the past, does not have total security control over the Gaza Strip and cannot guarantee a ceasefire agreement will be completely implemented). The PA as well, which regards itself as the Palestinians' exclusive representative, may object to a bilateral agreement (even an indirect one) between Hamas and Israel which will relieve Hamas' strategic distress, and may raise political obstacles.

## Appendix A

# Palestinian Reactions to the Proposed Long-Term Agreement with Israel for a Lull in the Hostilities

## Hamas

1. **Ismail Haniya**, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, told a delegation of senior PIJ figures that the Hamas movement did not object to a **five-year *hudna*** with Israel on condition that Israel did not annex Judea and Samaria. He claimed deliberations had to be held within the framework of "national consensus" (Quds.net, March 22, 2015).
2. **Sami Abu Zuhri**, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, claimed in response to items in the various media that a number of international agencies had presented Hamas with such a proposal. However, he claimed Hamas had not yet responded to it. That was because Hamas wanted to discuss it first and then receive "national consensus" (Facebook page of Sami Abu Zuhri, March 9, 2015).
3. **Salah al-Bardawil**, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, claimed that Robert Serry, the UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process, had raised the issue of a temporary lull in the hostilities (*tahdiya*). Hamas, he said, had not given him an answer because the issue did not relate only to Hamas but to all the Palestinian factions. He claimed **a ceasefire could not last longer than three years** because it would be hard to implement and involved a high political price (Alresala.net, March 13, 2015).
4. **Taher al-Nunu**, a member of Hamas' information department, claimed that Hamas had discussed the proposal received at the end of Operation Protective Edge, which was supposed to complete the efforts to stabilize a ceasefire. He claimed Hamas would present the proposal to the other organizations and consult with them to issue a uniform position (Sawt al-Aqsa Radio, March 18, 2015).

## The Palestinian Authority

5. The PA leadership revealed it had information indicating that the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip had agreed to **a long-term ceasefire with Israel under Qatari supervision**, as had been proposed by international agencies. According to the members of the PLO's Executive Committee, the issue had been on the agenda

of the most recent Executive Committee meeting. Mahmoud Abbas expressed concern over making such an agreement with Hamas without the full agreement of all the Palestinians (Palestinefree.com, March 29, 2015).

## Appendix B

### "Why Do You Object to a Hudna with Gaza?"

#### (The main points of the Facebook posting of Dr. Fayez Abu Shamala, March 23, 2015)

1. **Dr. Fayez Abu Shamala** is an academic and journalist from the Gaza Strip, affiliated with Hamas. On March 23, 2015, he posted an article on his Facebook page called **"Why do you object to a hudna with Gaza?"** It was severely critical of the PA, which, he claimed, objected to the idea. He asked the PA a series of difficult questions, and **called on the Hamas leadership to adopt an independent political policy and promote a lull in the hostilities with Israel for five years, and even longer.**

2. He began with the following questions for the PA:

1) **Why do you object to a five-year ceasefire (*hudna*) between the Israelis and Gazans, when at the same time you have maintained a de facto ceasefire in the West Bank for more than ten years?** Why are you angry about [the idea of] a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and accuse Gaza of defending the borders of the country of the Jews, and accuse the resistance of being useless, while you prevent the resistance [from operating] in the West Bank and even prevent people from thinking about resistance?

2) **Why are you satisfied with the crossings between the West Bank and the rest of the world, and with the movement of tens of thousands of Palestinian workers to the West Bank settlements and Israel, when at the same time you object to a proposal to lift the siege of the Gaza Strip?** Why do you fight against Qatar's involvement in reconstructing the Gaza Strip? **Why do you object to any agency working to open the Gaza Strip crossings and the construction of a seaport and an airport in Gaza?**

3) **Why have you held fruitless negotiations with Israel for ten years without making the lifting of the siege of the Gaza Strip one of your conditions?** Why were you angry when reports were leaked that Israel and the Gaza Strip were holding secret talks for lifting the siege and opening the crossings? **Why are only you permitted to negotiate with Israel while all others are forbidden?**

4) **Why aren't you angry about the continuing expansion of the settlements in the West Bank** and about the continued detention of thousands of prisoners or about the raids conducted by the IDF in Palestinian cities? Why did you support the Swiss initiative for solving the issue of the employees [who did not receive their salaries] when at the same time you discovered that the Gazans were discriminated against compared with the Palestinians of the West Bank?

5) **Why did you circumvent Dr. Haidar Abd al-Shafi during the Palestinian negotiations in Madrid and why did you conduct secret negotiation with Israel about "Gaza and Jericho first" at Oslo**, but when others negotiate about Gaza you find it unacceptable?

3. Having asked his questions, Dr. Abu Shamala says that the Palestinians in the territories and abroad **should shatter the worldview held by the Palestinian leadership, which has led the Palestinian cause from bad to worse**. He accuses the Palestinian leadership of taking decision-making upon itself without considering any other opinion.

4. Dr. Abu Shamala says, **"We demand the leadership of the resistance in Gaza [i.e., Hamas] adopt an independent political policy that does not take the historical leadership into consideration. [We demand the leadership of the resistance] continue its secret and public meetings with all Arab, regional and international agencies to lift the siege of the Gaza Strip and reach a lull [tahdiya] [in the hostilities] with the Israel enemy for five years and even longer."**

5. He finishes the article by writing that **the lull in the Gaza Strip has to be the starting point of "the armed resistance" [i.e., terrorism] in the West Bank, Nablus, Hebron, Jenin and the Jordan Valley**. He claims that the Palestinian people in the West Bank should be allowed to respond to their own way to the lull in Gaza. He also notes that the lull agreement will **lead to an outbreak of "resistance" in the West Bank which will be joined by the "resistance" in the Gaza Strip with rockets of the resistance that will be launched at the Israeli cities**.

## Appendix C

### A Portrait of Dr. Fayez Abu Shamala



Fayez Abu Shamala (Twitter account of Fayez Abu Shamala, March 26, 2015).

1. **Dr. Fayez Abu Shamala** is a political commentator **affiliated with Hamas**. He is an academic and teaches at Al-Quds University in Gaza. His articles are posted on Hamas websites such as Felesteen.ps and Paltimes.net.
2. He was born in Khan Yunis in 1950. He got his PhD in 2004; his subject of his thesis was "War and peace in Arab literature and Arab literature in Palestine."
3. He was mayor of Khan Yunis between 2006 and 2008.
4. He was imprisoned in Israel for ten years. He speaks Hebrew.
5. His son **Hazem Abu Shamala** was a senior PIJ Jerusalem Brigades terrorist operative in Khan Yunis. He was killed on July 27, 2014, during Operation Protective Edge.
6. Dr. Abu Shamala **often attacks the PA leadership in his articles** and accuses it of responsibility for the siege on the Gaza Strip and the internal Palestinian schism.