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**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
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Iran and Hamastan: From Iran's perspective, the establishment of a Hamas-dominated entity in the Gaza Strip presents both opportunities and risks, in general tipping the scales in Iran's favor. Iran publicly recognized the legitimacy of Ismail Haniya's government and is expected to continue providing Hamas with economic and military aid.



Iranian foreign minister Mamuchehr Mottaki in a meeting with Imad al-Alami, a member of Hamas's political bureau (Al-Alam TV, July 7). Iran is the only country so far to have received a senior Hamas delegation since the organization took over the Gaza Strip.

Overview

1. The dramatic developments which led to the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip and the creation of “Hamastan” surprised Iran, in our assessment, and created a **new situation** in the internal Palestinian arena, which holds both opportunities and risks for Iran. The main ones are the following:

A. **On the one hand**, the establishment of a Hamas-controlled entity reinforces Iran’s deterrent image and creates new opportunities for Iran to maneuver against Israel, the moderate Arab camp and the Western countries. That is because the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip can be perceived as the victory of the ideology the radical Islamic movement which is supported by the Iranian-Syrian axis. That ideology includes resolving the Israeli-Arab conflict through terrorism and violence. The takeover weakened the nationalist-secular and pro-Western trend in Palestinian society and also harmed American and Israeli interests.

B. **On the other hand**, Iran had no control over the events leading to the establishment of Hamastan. The worsening tension between Hamastan and Israel, the opposition to Hamastan of most of the Arab world and its isolation in the international arena have all created the potential for weakening Hamas rule. It may also show that such a radical Islamic entity, like the one created in the Gaza Strip, is not viable in the long run (and whose regional implications go beyond the Israeli-Palestinian context). In addition, recent events have also deepened the ideological and political schism in the Palestinian society and may draw attention away from the violent campaign against Israel.

2. So far, Iran seems to be studying the situation and formulating its policy regarding the recent developments in the Palestinian arena. In our assessment, **at this point Iran is trying to maneuver between various considerations and constraints**: One consideration is its desire to settle the differences of opinion between Hamas and Fatah in order to focus their activity on the campaign against Israel; another is its desire to exploit the event to strengthen Hamas and radical Islam, and encourage the use of

violence and terrorism against Israel, a common interest for both Hamas and the Iranian regime.

3. With that in mind, senior Iranian figures and the Iranian media expressed their **support** for Hamas and Ismail Haniya's government, criticizing Fatah and Abu Mazen were criticized. At the same time they called for Hamas-Fatah **unity**, and expressed their **worry** as to what might result from the split in Palestinian society. On the **diplomatic front, Iran is so far the only country** to have hosted a Hamas delegation since the organization took over the Gaza Strip.

A summary of Iranian responses to the establishment of Hamastan in the Gaza Strip

Senior figures

4. Senior figures within the Iranian regime recognized the legitimacy of Ismail Haniya's government but at the same time called upon Hamas and Fatah to reconcile their differences. Some of the responses were the following:

A. On June 17, **Mohammed Ali Hosseini, Iranian foreign ministry spokesman**, stated that Iran would invite representatives of all the factions to Iran to settle their internal differences and avoid clashes. He added that all the factions had to close the gaps between them and begin a common campaign against "the Zionist enemy" in order to restore their rights. However, he also noted that the Palestinians had to respect the results of the elections (to the Palestinian Legislative Council) to restore democracy (i.e., to recognize the legitimacy of the Hamas government).

B. **Mehdi Mustafawi, deputy Iranian foreign minister**, stated that the establishment of the Palestinian emergency government in the West Bank parallel to the Haniya government in the Gaza Strip was undemocratic. He warned that it would "serve to fuel other conflicts in occupied Palestine," and called upon the factions to settle their

differences through dialogue, in that only Israel benefitted from the current situation.

C. On June 23, **Hamid Reza Haji Baba'**, a member of the **Iranian committee for foreign policy and national security**, accused Israel and the United States of "plotting" to cause a rift among the Palestinians. He called upon Fatah and Hamas to join forces and turn their resources against Israel.

D. On June 26, **Gholam Ali Haddad- Adel**, chairman of the **Iranian Majlis**, called upon Hamas and Fatah to settle the conflict between them. He extolled Palestinian solidarity and at the same time expressed support for the legitimacy of the elected Hamas government.

The Iranian press

5. The conservative Iranian press expressed support for Hamas which, it claimed, "had been elected in democratic elections" (Keyhan International). At the same time, as part of its desire to bring an end to the confrontations, it claimed that "the Zionist regime profited most from the clashes" (Tehran Times).

6. The daily **Jumhuri**, one of Leader Khamenei's mouthpieces, sided unequivocally with Hamas, severely criticizing Fatah and Abu Mazen. Some of the main points of Jumhuri articles were:

A. On June 20 an editorial expressed the hope that recent developments would prove that Hamas had drawn the right conclusions, and that it intended to refrain from integrating into the Palestinian Authority, which reflected the "disgusting legacy of Arafat's tendency to compromise," and would join the efforts of the Islamic jihad in Palestine **to carry out "the orders to destroy the Zionist regime."** Jumhuri repeatedly stated that the solution had to be formulated in **"the spirit of remarks made by Khomeini regarding wiping Israel from the pages of history."**

B. On June 26 an editorial **accused Fatah of having betrayed the Palestinian people** because for years it had collaborated with Israel

and the United States. Therefore, no government should be allowed to be established in accordance with Abu Mazen's proposals because that would lead to a situation in which "the Zionist regime would again control Palestinian fate under the guise of nationalism." The editorial also attacked Egypt and Jordan's "cursed" regime for their mediation in the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

C. On July 3 an additional editorial belittled Salam Fayyad's government and described it as "a puppet government of the Zionist regime."

The first visit of a Hamas delegation to Tehran.

7. On July 7 a Hamas delegation, representing the "external" leadership in Damascus, visited Tehran. Two members of the delegation were **Imad al-Alami**, a senior terrorist operative and member of the Hamas political bureau, and **Muhammad Nasser**, a member of the political bureau. The delegation deliberated with senior Iranian figures. Among others, al-Alami met with Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (currently Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council of Iran) and with Mamuchehr Mottaki, Iranian foreign minister.

8. On the same day, after the meeting Mottaki made a cautious statement expressing his support for the Palestinian national unity government and expressing hope that al-Alami's consultations in Tehran would play a significant role in resolving the Palestinians' internal differences of opinion.

Iranian support for Hamas

9. Since the Hamas victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections, Iran has increased its financial, military and political support for the organization.¹ In our assessment, **the support will continue** and increase following the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, to fortify Hamastan's ability to survive and to improve its terrorist operative capabilities against Israel.²

10. **Musheir al-Masri**, Hamas representative in the Palestinian Legislative Council, was asked whether Hamas would agree to accept aid from Iran. He answered that despite Hamas's ideological differences with Iran, Iranian support, if offered, would be accepted. He added that Iranian support was "a thousand times preferable to putting our trust in the Americans and Zionists..." (Al-Zaman, July 7, 2007)

¹ For further information see our March 11, 2007 Bulletin entitled ["Anti-Israeli Terrorism, 2006: Data, Analysis and Trends"](#)

² Tawfiq al-Tirawi, commander of Palestinian general intelligence, said in an interview that more than 70 Hamas terrorist operatives on their way back to the Gaza Strip after training in Iran, were among the thousands of Palestinians held up at the Rafah Crossing (Al-Quds, July 14).