



Hamas clarifies that it will not change its fundamental positions: it will not disarm, continue seek to eliminate Israel, adhere to terrorism ("resistance") and deepen its strategic relations with Iran.

October 25, 2017

Overview

► On October 12, 2017, Fatah and Hamas signed the internal reconciliation agreement, whose stated objective was to bring the Palestinian schism to an end. Two weeks after the signing there appears to be great activity conducted to implement the agreement, which centers on transferring Hamas' governmental institutions in the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian national consensus government (through ministerial visits, activating teams and joint committees). Hamas spokesman have repeatedly stated their deep commitment to implementing the reconciliation agreement and supporting the transfer of the governmental institutions in the Gaza Strip to the national consensus government.

► However, Hamas **has made it unequivocally clear that it has no intention of disarming (or of even discussing the issue), or of recognizing Israel, or of stopping its terrorism ("resistance") or of changing its policies towards Iran.** The following are the statements made by Hamas spokesman about those three key issues (see below):

- ◆ **Absolute refusal to disarm: Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip,** has repeatedly stated that **Hamas will not give up its weapons.** The weapons, he claimed, are not Hamas' property, or the property of the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, but rather of every resident of the Gaza Strip. He claimed the weapons "have to be under the national protection of the PLO, in which all Palestinians will participate" [i.e., receiving national legitimization for Hamas' weapons]. He claimed that **for years Hamas has maintained a strong [military] infrastructure which can strike Tel Aviv in 51 minutes [with the same quantity] as it struck Tel Aviv for 51 days** [in Operation Protective Edge in 2014] (Hamas website, October 24, 2017). During his visit to Iran, **Saleh al-'Arouri,** deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, who signed the reconciliation agreement with Fatah, also stressed that **Hamas would not lay down the arms of the "resistance"** (al-Alam, September 22, 2017).

- ◆ **Refusal to recognize Israel and striving to destroy it: Yahya al-Sinwar,** speaking before young Gazans, **said it was out of the question that Hamas would recognize**

Israel. He said **no one could force Hamas to recognize Israel or even discuss the issue.** "The time for discussing the recognition of Israel has passed, and **today we discuss the question of when Israel will be eliminated**" (Hamas website, October 19, 2017). During the visit to Tehran, **Saleh al-'Arouri** also stressed that **Hamas would not recognize Israel** (al-Alam, October 22, 2017).

◆ **Seeking to increase "strategic relations" with Iran, the main supporter of Hamas' military-terrorist wing:** On October 20, 2017, a Hamas delegation headed by Saleh al-'Arouri visited Iran. Saleh al-'Arouri **said Iran was Hamas' main supporter,** and its support was manifested "in all areas" [**Note:** Iran has been behind the military buildup of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), supplying them with weapons, technology, and financial aid¹]. He added that one of the key issues the delegation discussed with senior Iranian figures **was an increase in the scope of its support for Hamas.** He said Hamas hoped the support would continue "**until the defeat of the occupation**" (al-Alam, October 22, 2017). **Khaled al-Qadoumi, Hamas representative in Iran,** said **Hamas was strengthening its "strategic relations" with Iran,** which supported and would continue to support the "Palestinian resistance" in "all areas" (alresalah.net, October 22, 2017).

In ITIC assessment the statements were intended **to send the message to the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israel and the United States that they could not expect Hamas to change its fundamental positions,** meet their expectations or the conditions of the International Quartet. That was because **the positions were part of Hamas' DNA and renegeing on them would mean changing Hamas' character, which was out of the question.**

► Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the PA, has stated that **he would not allow the "model of Hezbollah in Lebanon" to exist in the Gaza Strip** (Misr al-Arabiya, October 11, 2017; Katabat, October 12 2017). Interviewed by a number of Chinese media personnel in his office in Ramallah, Mahmoud Abbas said there had to be **one authority, one law, one rifle, one set of weapons.** That was **to prevent the existence of militias** and so the Palestinians would be like the rest of the countries in the world (RT in Arabic, October 24, 2017). That is Mahmoud Abbas' position in principle, but so far Fatah figures have avoided raising those

¹ For further information about Iranian support for Hamas and the PIJ see the January 20, 2013 bulletin, "Iranian support for the Palestinian terrorist organizations Iran supports the military buildup of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and seeks to rebuild their military capabilities after Operation Pillar of Defense, especially their rocket-launching networks."

issues, focusing instead on the easier matters of transferring the government in the Gaza Strip.

► If the reconciliation proceeds as it has begun, that is, **transferring governmental responsibilities** in the Gaza Strip to the PA while **leaving control effectively in the hands of Hamas**, then the **"model of Hezbollah in Lebanon,"** which Mahmoud Abbas fears, may be created in the Gaza Strip. If that happens **Hamas will retain its military force and its freedom to play politics, while the PA will display control of the Gaza Strip.** That means Hamas' military wing will continue its buildup (as the military buildup of Hezbollah in Lebanon); **Hamas will determine the PA's strategies regarding Israel (as in Lebanon they are determined by Iran and Hezbollah); and Hamas will continue to conduct its own anti-American, anti-West foreign policy, while increasing ties with Iran and the Iranian axis in the Middle East (Iran-Syria-Hezbollah).**

Appendix

Statements made by senior Hamas figures about weapons, recognition of Israel and ties with Iran

Yahya al-Sinwar, head of Hamas' political bureau, at a meeting of trade union representatives in the Gaza Strip

- ▶ On **October 24, 2017**, **Yahya al-Sinwar** met with trade union representatives in the Gaza Strip. One of the issues he spoke about was the disarming of Hamas. He claimed that during the past years Hamas had sacrificed many victims **to construct the "resistance force"** [i.e., Hamas' military buildup] **and had no intention of giving it up**. Hamas rejected outright Israel's terms regarding the reconciliation. **In no circumstances would Hamas recognize Israel or give up its weapons or waive any one of its principles**. He claimed the weapons Hamas had stockpiled were not its own property or the property of al-Qassam [the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military-terrorist wing], but belonged to every resident of the Gaza Strip. He added that as a people the Palestinians were still at the stage of national liberation, **and it was out of the question that they lay down their arms**. The arms of the Palestinians, he claimed, "have to be under the national protection of the PLO, in which all Palestinians will participate" (Hamas website, October 24, 2017).
- ▶ According to Yahya al-Sinwar, the [situation of] the Palestinian resistance [i.e., Hamas and the other terrorist organizations] is good. Over the years, he said, the "resistance" has constructed a strong infrastructure **which could strike Tel Aviv in 51 minutes [with the same quantity] as it struck Tel Aviv for 51 days" [i.e., Operation Protective Edge, 2014]**. Therefore, if Israel does something stupid or intervenes to make the reconciliation fail, Hamas will teach Israel a lesson that will keep it from ever trying again (Palinfo, October 24, 2017).



Yahya al-Sinwar at a meeting with representatives of the trade unions in the Gaza Strip. At his left (tan suit) is Dr. Suhail al-Hindi, a member of Hamas' political bureau in the Gaza Strip and formerly chairman of UNRWA's Palestinian staff union in the Gaza Strip, who was forced to leave his position after his affiliation with Hamas was exposed (Palinfo, October 24, 2017).

Yahya al-Sinwar at a meeting with young Gazans

► On October 19, 2017, **Yahya al-Sinwar** held a meeting closed to the media with about **250 young people from the Gaza Strip**. He called on them to support the reconciliation process, which was, he said, **a good opportunity for solving the problem of their employment**. The following are the main points he made (Hamas website, Palinfo, Safa and Paltoday, October 19, 2017):

- ◆ **Reconciliation with Fatah** – Al-Sinwar said Hamas had made its decision and there was no going back, because its failure would threaten the future of the Palestinian national program. In response to accusations that Hamas had been the loser in the agreement, he said the only winners were the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause, and that Hamas was willing to make concessions for the good of the Palestinian people.
- ◆ **Recognition of Israel** – Al-Sinwar rejected the terms of the Israeli Cabinet, which include recognition of Israel. He claimed the Cabinet **could not force conditions on Hamas regarding the reconciliation, which was a purely Palestinian issue. He said no one could extract recognition of Israel from Hamas or discuss it with Hamas. "The time to discuss recognition of Israel has passed, and today we discuss when Israel will be eliminated."**
- ◆ **Disarming Hamas** – Al-Sinwar claimed Hamas was not a terrorist organization but rather a "resistance movement" working for freedom and "fighting the occupation according to the rules of international law and human rights." Therefore, he claimed, **no one in the world could take Hamas' weapons away. He claimed Hamas would continue ceaselessly to build up its [military-terrorist] force.**

- ◆ **Exchange of prisoners** – Al-Sinwar stressed that **the Israeli soldiers held prisoner would not see the light of day until Palestinian prisoners**, such as Hassan Salameh, Abbas al-Sayid, Mahmoud Issa, Marwan Barghouti and Ahmed Saadat **were released**.



Yahya al-Sinwar meets with young people in the Gaza Strip (Hamas website, October 19, 2017).

Statements from the members of the Hamas delegation to Iran

Visit of a Hamas delegation to Iran

► A Hamas delegation visited Iran, headed by Saleh al-'Arouri, recently elected as **deputy head of Hamas' political bureau** (he was also one of the signers of the reconciliation agreement in Cairo). Members of the delegation included **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas representative in Iran Khaled al-Qadoumi**, and other senior Hamas figures (Hamas website, October 20, 2017). The members of the delegation met with senior Iranian figures.



Right: Members of the Hamas delegation headed by Saleh al-'Arouri arrive in Tehran (Hamas website, October 20, 2017). Left: Cartoon of Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu's anger at the Hamas delegation's visit to Tehran (alresalah.net, October 23, 2017).

► Saleh al-'Arouri met with **Ali Shamkhani**, secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security, and told him that the United States and the "Zionist regime" were concerned about the change in the regional balance of power, which was tipping in favor of the peoples and governments fighting terrorist groups. He said on his first visit to Iran since having been elected to his position **his intention was to strengthen ties with Iran, which supports the Palestinian people** (ISNA, October 20, 2017).

► Senior Hamas figures gave a series of interviews where they stressed that the objective of the visit was **to strengthen ties with Iran**, but not at the expense of the internal Palestinian reconciliation. **They also praised Iran's support for Hamas**. Some of their statements were the following:

- ◆ **Saleh al-'Arouri, deputy head of Hamas' political bureau**, said the delegation's visit to Iran had two objectives: to update all those supporting the Palestinian cause about the reconciliation agreement and to show Hamas' defiance to the reaction of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the agreement. **Saleh al-'Arouri stressed that Hamas would not surrender the weapons of the "resistance" and would not recognize Israel. He said Iran was the main supporter of Hamas' military wing** and its support was manifested in all areas. He also said the main issue the delegation had come to discuss with senior Iranian figures was **an increase in Iranian aid. He said Iran was the main and primary support of Hamas' military wing** in developing its capabilities, whether its level of technical expertise or direct support. He added that Hamas hoped Iranian aid would continue to "defeat the occupation" (al-Alam, October 22, 2017).



**Saleh al-'Arouri interviewed in Iran
(al-Alam TV, October 22, 2017).**

- ◆ **Khaled al-Qadoumi, Hamas representative in Iran**, said the visit of the Hamas delegation was part of its diplomatic activities to report on recent developments in the Palestinian cause, especially national issues related to the struggle against Israel. **He said Hamas was working to strengthen its strategic relations with Iran and said Iran supported and would continue to support the Palestinian "resistance"** [i.e., terrorism] **in all areas** (alresalah.net, October 22, 2017).
- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Taher al-Nunu** said the objective of visiting Iran was to strengthen bilateral strategic relations. During the visit, he said, they had discussed recent regional developments in the Palestinian cause, challenges with Israel and the United States, and the issue of the reconciliation. **He said Hamas was interested in strengthening its ties to regional countries, among them Iran and Qatar.** He also said relations would not come at the expense of the reconciliation or relations with Egypt (al-Mayadeen, October 20, 2017).
- ◆ **Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri** said the objective of the visit was to update the Iranians about recent developments in the internal Palestinian reconciliation, especially regarding the issue of **the "resistance" and its weapons. He said the main issue discussed was Iran's support for the "resistance" and the American efforts to harm it.** Sami Abu Zuhri said that Hamas would cooperate with all those who supported the Palestinian cause and that the direct connection between Hamas and Iran would not harm the reconciliation agreement (al-Mayadeen, October 21, 2017).

Musa Abu Marzouq, a member of Hamas' political bureau

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