

Academic Study

Hamas Position vis-à-vis the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Fractions

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Hamas Position vis-à-vis the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Factions¹

(In particular Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP))

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Introduction

When Hamas was launched in 1987, the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation of Palestine entered a new phase. The launching of Hamas was considered a great boost for the Palestinian national movement. So it was only natural that Hamas should join the PLO, being one of the largest Palestinian factions and the most popular and influential. That is if the PLO was to really represent the Palestinian people, especially considering the fact that some of its factions no longer carried any real weight among Palestinians, not at home nor in the Diaspora. Furthermore, some members of its Executive Committee represented only themselves, and had almost no role in the popular national struggle.

The purpose of the founding of the PLO was to unify the ranks of the Palestinian people in a single organization, to enable them all to participate in the liberation of Palestine, occupied since 1948; and this was the organization’s first milestone. The second milestone was the entry of Palestinian guerilla organizations into the PLO, after less than three years of its founding. So if Hamas (with Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine—PIJ at its side) were to join

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the PLO, this move would be the third major milestone; thereby the PLO would actually represent all segments of the Palestinian people.

The purpose of the founding of the PLO in 1964 was to work toward the liberation of Palestine, occupied in 1948. The reason for the entry of armed Palestinian organizations, led by Fatah and the PFLP, into PLO institutions, was to lend support to armed struggle as the right approach to liberate occupied Palestine. The call for Hamas to join the PLO came in the context of supporting the Palestinian national project that demands the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea. This followed a decline of this rallying call following the signing by the PLO of the Oslo Accords in 1993, which reflected negatively on the PLO and consequently it lost its mandate to represent the Palestinian people inside Palestine and abroad. Hamas still proposes the goal of the liberation of Palestine, the motto of the PLO at its founding and then its primary goal. Therefore, the probability of Hamas joining PLO institutions would represent the organization's third birth, according to a statement by Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas political bureau in 22/12/2011. This asserts that Hamas is not against the PLO, but rather is against its political agenda; and that in the event of Hamas joining the PLO, this could lead to the re-drafting of the Palestinian national project on new foundations.

It must be noted at the outset that it is difficult to talk about Hamas's position vis-a-vis the PLO without an overlap occurring between this position and its position toward Fatah, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and other factions, such as the PFLP and the DFLP on the grounds that the officials in three of those organizations (PLO, PA and Fatah) represent the same political line and directions; in addition to the fact that the PFLP and DFLP are members of the PLO. That is why there may be some overlap when analyzing Hamas's positions toward the PLO, the PA and Fatah.

First: Hamas' Position Vis-à-Vis the PLO, Fatah and the PA

When the PLO was founded, its president, Ahmad al-Shuqayri, aspired to have the various Palestinian political currents and organizations represented within it; an aspiration he failed to realize. Guerilla organizations, such as the Fatah Movement and the Youth for Revenge (later PFLP), remained outside the organization until 1968 when all the Palestinian factions joined the organization



and took control of it; but this was after al-Shuqayri's resignation. However, the presence of all these factions in the organization did not lead to their agreement on a unified national program; as each of them kept its entity and program independent from that of the PLO; with Fatah controlling the organization and its national program. These factions failed to change the PLO's policies and political positions on different issues, for these reflected those policies of Fatah more than those of the other factions.

The disagreements between the PLO's leadership and Fatah, during the 1960s, were similar to those taking place between Hamas on the one hand and the PLO and Fatah on the other in recent years. They were due not only to contradictions in political stances regarding the peace process, the recognition of Israel, and the agreements concluded with it that were signed only by the PLO and the PA, but also to the failure of the PLO in fulfilling its promises to the Palestinian people, and distancing itself from the fundamentals of the Palestinian issue. It is well known that, during the sixties, Fatah took control of the PLO, due to its raising of the flag of armed struggle against Israel, and its call for the removal of Israel by way of a popular war of liberation. The Palestinian people stood by them and by the other Palestinian organizations that called for armed struggle, and abandoned their support for the PLO leadership. Some even blamed al-Shuqayri for the Arab countries' defeat, of which he was innocent. While he was the same person behind whom the Palestinian masses stood when he founded the PLO in 1964, and whom they supported during his visits to Palestinian refugee camps and gatherings in the Palestinian Diaspora. The support al-Shuqayri enjoyed was transferred to the Palestinian organizations; at their head, the Fatah movement, which very skillfully used this support to control the PLO leadership, in what could be described as a bloodless coup. Fatah did not take leadership of the PLO through elections, but by sounding the call for resistance, supported by the Palestinian and Arab masses. If elections had been held then, Fatah could have won a victory similar to the one secured by Hamas in the legislative elections of 2006.

Fatah was the harshest critic of the PLO leadership before it took control of the organization and waged a media war against it. In a program devised by Fatah under the title "The Movement and the Proposed Entity," it was stated that the Palestinian issue could only be solved militarily and by putting an end to the Arab trusteeship over Palestine. It also accused the PLO: "that it carries hollow



mottos, that it is not revolutionary, and that it takes from the people without giving to them.” On 9/12/1967, it distributed a memorandum at the conference of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo, in which it criticized the policies of al-Shuqayri, and emphasized that “it trusts neither his person nor his actions.” In recent years, this matter was repeated in a similar fashion when Hamas criticized the PLO and its political stances.

Fatah entered the fourth session of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in 1968, and won 38 seats out of 100, the total number of PNC members at the time. It dominated the PLO with more than 55% majority, due to the support of a number of independent members. This is approximately the same ratio obtained by Hamas in the legislative elections held in the West Bank (WB) and the Gaza Strip (GS) in 2006.

The relationship between Hamas and Fatah has been characterized by rivalry, distrust, and sometimes infighting. Since the founding of Hamas, there has been rivalry between the two; noting that both were working in the climate of the *Intifadah* (uprising) and the Palestinian popular resistance to Israeli occupation. The existence of two different programs for the two movements contributed to the heightening of the discord between them, because the program of Fatah and the PLO is primarily based on reaching the peace settlement plan through negotiations, and on working to establish a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders; this took formal expression in the Oslo Accords of 1993. While the Hamas program is based on the resistance approach, recognizing the futility of negotiations, and the rejection of the Oslo Accords and its consequences.³

The essence of the dispute between Hamas and Fatah is the contradiction between their two plans; it is linked to the ideological points of reference of each and their reliance on different ideological and intellectual bases. Hamas proceeds from an Islamic reference with the belief that Palestine from the sea to the river is an Islamic *waqf* (endowments) land. While Fatah embraces peace settlement solutions that call for the two states’ option in historic Palestine, and living side by side with Israel in comprehensive peace.⁴ Hamas insists on the continuation of

³ ‘Awwad Jamil Abed al-Khadir ‘Awada, The Problematic Relation Between Fatah and Hamas and its Impact on the Democratic Change in Palestine, 2004–2010, Master Thesis, The Faculty of Graduate Studies, An-Najah National University, Palestine, 2011, pp. 117–130. (in Arabic)

⁴ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, The Experience of Dialogue Between Fatah and Hamas, Where is the Problem?, site of Aljazeera.net, 4/9/2008, <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/C8518609-168D-49AE-A26F-E421CC9E75AB.htm#0> (in Arabic)



resistance and *Jihad* (military struggle), while the Fatah leadership has declared its renunciation of violence and armed struggle against Israel.

Among the other reasons that had affected the relationships between the two is Fatah's monopolization of power, Hamas's participation in the elections, competing with Fatah over this branch of authority, and Fatah's fear of the widening popularity of Hamas and the possibility of its supplanting Fatah as the most powerful domestic party. Hamas's position was consolidated by the failure of the negotiations between the leadership of Fatah (the organization) and Israel. Furthermore, despite the Israeli-imposed blockade on Hamas-controlled GS, Hamas managed to survive and had some great successes in repelling Israeli aggression against the GS.⁵

1. Evolution of the Relationship 1987–1993

In this period, Hamas did not preoccupy itself with becoming a substitute for the PLO; rather it hoped to provide the Palestinian struggle with fresh support after the PLO had moved away from the objectives for which it was established. It was difficult for the PLO to allow Hamas to join the organization without the PLO making major reforms that reflected Hamas's vision and its national project, and without conserving its true weight among the Palestinians in the organization and ending Fatah's monopoly over it. In many instances, the covert rejection and the stalling in admitting Hamas to the organization came from those dominating the PLO (Fatah) as well as from other factions, as they feared that Hamas joining the organization would come at their expense. That is why it was natural that, after Hamas had won the legislative elections, it should join the organization, providing it with weight and support rather than staying outside the PLO.

From the beginning, the question was whether Hamas actually wanted to join the PLO, or if it preferred to remain outside its institutions. In reality, and despite the ambiguity that accompanied Hamas's stance vis-à-vis the PLO during some intervals, it kept in touch with the PLO, even in the most difficult times when the positions of Hamas were far removed from those of the organization. Article 27 of the Hamas Charter, which deals with its relationship with the PLO, states the following:

⁵ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, The Violated Palestinian Legitimacy, Aljazeera.net, 18/10/2008, <http://www.aljazeera.net/opinions/pages/4fc6f519-bb9a-495b-8fa2-97c27eaab2f6> (in Arabic)



The Palestine Liberation Organization is closest of the close to the Islamic Resistance Movement, in that it is the father, the brother, the relative, or friend; and does the Muslim offend his father, brother, relative, or friend? Our nation is one, plight is one, destiny is one, and our enemy is the same the position of the Islamic Resistance Movement toward the Palestine Liberation Organization is the position of a son toward his father, and the brother toward his brother, and the relative toward his relative. He will be hurt if a thorn pricks him; he supports him in confronting the enemy and wishes guidance for him.⁶

Some may criticize the Hamas Charter for its lack of clarity in defining its relationship with the PLO, because it does not explicitly recognize the organization as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” as the PLO presents itself, and as it is recognized in the Arab League and the United Nations. The charter describes their relationship as intimate, like that “of a son toward his father and the brother toward his brother.” Yet the dispute with the PLO is based on the grounds that it is a secular organization. The charter states “we cannot exchange the current and future of Islam in Palestine to adopt the secular ideology..... When the Palestine Liberation Organization adopts Islam as its system of life, we will be its soldiers and the firewood of its fire, which will burn the enemies.” Thus we note the absence of an explicit position regarding the PLO representation of the Palestinian people.

With the start of the first *Intifadah*, a tense situation arose between Hamas and the PLO factions, which had formed a new coalition, called “Unified National Leadership of the Uprising” (UNLU); as each side sought to prove its precedence and priority in leading the *Intifadah* through the communiqés issued by each. However, it is known that Hamas’s first communiqué in this *Intifadah* was issued on 14/12/1987; while the first communiqué by the UNLU was issued in early January 1988. According to a study by Yezid Sayigh, Fatah issued its first appeal in the name of the “Palestinian National Forces” on 8/1/1988, followed by a similar appeal by the PFLP two days later; while the first communiqué by the

⁶ Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), August 1988, Article 27. The charter was translated by Muhammad Maqdsi for the Islamic Association for Palestine, Dallas, Texas, in 1990, and was published in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), Beirut, vol. XXII, no. 4, Summer 1993, pp. 122–134, <http://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jps-articles/1734.pdf>



UNLU was issued on 16/1/1988.⁷ Also, a document published by the Palestine News and Information Agency (WAFA) indicated that the second communiqué by the UNLU was issued on 10/1/1988, without providing the text and the date of the first communiqué.⁸

Almost a year after the Hamas Charter was issued, in an interview with *Filisteen al-Muslima* magazine, specifically in response to a question about Hamas recognition of the PLO as representative of the Palestinian people, Hamas Leader Ahmad Yasin made a distinction between the PLO as a national framework and the PLO as a political orientation and an existing structure. In terms of its goals and form, the PLO as a national framework was acceptable to Hamas, as stated in its charter. As for the PLO as a political orientation “currently recognizing Israel and the resolutions of the international legitimacy, it is rejected.”⁹ Hence, the dispute with the PLO is no longer based only on the grounds that it is a secular organization, but also on “its recognition of Israel.” The dispute had become wider; it had become one between two contradictory Palestinian projects: one adopted by the PLO in which it recognizes Israel in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the WB and GS, and another belonging to Hamas that calls for the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea from the Israeli occupation.

Thus the decision of Hamas to join the PLO is not the outcome of current events, for it is an old decision. The factor that keeps Hamas from joining the PLO is the absence of an agreement on common understandings with its leadership on the terms of its joining. How will Hamas enter the organization? Will it enter it according to its political program or according to a different approach? What weight would Hamas carry in the organization? Also, what about the organization’s structure?

Apart from what is in the Hamas Charter regarding its relationship with the PLO, and through an analysis of statements and positions expressed by the

⁷ Yezid Sayigh, *al-Kifah al-Musallah wa al-Bahth ‘an al-Dawlah: al-Harakah al-Wataniyyah al-Filastiniyyah, 1949–1993* (Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1948–1993) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2002), pp. 859–860.

⁸ Al-Intifadah Communiqués, site of WAFA Info,
<http://www.wafainfo.ps/atemplate.aspx?id=3973> (in Arabic)

⁹ See Ibrahim Abrash, Political Participation in the PLO on the Basis of Commitment to Palestinian Nationalism, site of al-Hiwar al-Mutamaddin, 12/11/2013, www.ahewar.org (in Arabic)



movement's leaders, it can be determined that Hamas's position seeks to change the equation of the Palestinian National Project; through the adoption of another project that focuses on the resistance against Israel in various ways, that does not recognize Israel, and that rejects the concessions made by the PLO to it, including the Oslo Accord and its annexations.

In 1990, 'Abdul Hamid al-Sa'ih, the speaker of the PNC, sent a formal invitation to Hamas to participate in the work of the preparatory committee of the council, at the time when the PLO was preparing to hold a new session of the PNC; but Hamas turned down the invitation. Instead, on 6/4/1990, it sent a note in which it stressed that elections and not appointments must be the primary means for selecting PNC members. And that if it became impossible to hold elections, the composition of the council should reflect the weight of the political forces on the ground. Hamas demanded the amendment of the Palestinian National Charter, in line with the doctrine of the Muslim Palestinian people and their genuine heritage. Hamas stressed the importance of national unity "at this critical juncture of our people's struggle." Adding, "That is why; we in Hamas open our hearts and souls and extend our hands to coordinate with all Palestinian forces, sides and institutions in the interest of our people and our cause."

Hamas laid down ten conditions for its participation in the PNC, which can be summarized in considering Palestine from the river to the sea and from the Negev to Ras al-Naqoura, one and indivisible, as the right of the Palestinian people; refusing to alienate any part of the land of Palestine; emphasizing the military option; considering *Jihad* the right way to liberate Palestine; refusing to recognize Israel; considering that the Palestinian issue belongs to the whole Arab and Islamic nation; renouncing all retreats, concessions and recognitions that are contrary to the rights, aspirations and sacrifices of the Palestinian people. Hamas demanded its rightful representation, proportional to its size and weight in all the PLO's institutions and agencies; and to be represented in the council with a number equal to its weight on the ground, which, in its opinion polls, ranges from 40–50% of the PNC total.¹⁰

¹⁰ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: al-Fikr wa al-Mumarasah al-Siyasiyyah* (Hamas: Political Thought and Practice) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), pp. 318–321; and Ibrahim Ghusheh, *The Red Minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghusheh (Ex-spokesman of Hamas)* (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2013), pp. 145–146.



This means that Hamas was not against the PLO as a political framework that represents the Palestinians, but against any deviation from the basic charter of the PLO.¹¹

Hamas's offer faced rejection from the Fatah movement that was in control of the PLO and its institutions; they considered it overblown. It would have been possible for Hamas to agree to reduce the percentage of the representation it offered, had it felt assured of the political and resistance choices of the PLO and its leadership. However, the PLO leadership was primarily concerned with widening the circle of its popular representation, by assimilating Hamas, represented by an easily controlled small number that would not actually have an effect on Palestinian national decision-making.

Once again Hamas was invited to participate in the work of the preparatory committee, charged with proposing principles and criteria for the new PNC, prior to the convening of the council at its 20th session in September 1991. Hamas was invited to name its representative to the meetings, but declined the invitation in its letter of May 1991, stressing that the principle that democracy, and not appointment, should be the means for choosing PNC members.¹²

Hamas criticized the decisions of the PNC meeting in Algiers in September 1991, which approved participation in the Madrid Conference. It felt that, in its formation, the PNC was not qualified to make momentous decisions, with the absence of a comprehensive representation of all Palestinian factions, including Hamas.

During this period, dialogues and negotiations took place between Fatah and Hamas, most notably the meeting that lasted three days during the period 10–12/8/1990, that is, one week after the occupation of Kuwait. The meeting was opened in the presence of Yasir 'Arafat. Hamas had a major reason for attending this meeting, which was that Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails (they were few at the time) were being subjected to persecution by Fatah inside the prisons. Hamas wanted to agree on a formula to stop this persecution. As for Fatah, it

¹¹ 'Awwad Jamil Abed al-Khadir 'Awada, *The Problematic Relation Between Fatah and Hamas and its Impact on the Democratic Change in Palestine, 2004–2010*. (in Arabic)

¹² Hafiz 'Alawi and Hani Sulaiman, "The Movements' Relations in the Palestinian Arena," in Jawad al-Hamad and Iyyad al-Barghouthi (eds.), *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987–1996* (A Study on the Political Thought of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas 1987–1996) (Amman: Middle East Studies Center (MESC), 1997), p. 266.



wanted to extract from Hamas recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The meeting did not exactly succeed; however, during the next month, specifically on 21/9/1990, a “document of honor” or a “gentlemen’s agreement” was signed between Fatah and Hamas to coordinate their efforts in the face of the enemy, so as to promote national unity. Then another meeting took place after an intervention by the Sudanese President Umar al-Bashir and his call for Fatah and Hamas to meet in August 1991 at the Presidential Palace in Khartoum. At this meeting, several issues were raised, including support for the *Intifadah* and joining the PLO; the meeting ended without agreement.¹³

In July 1992, serious clashes erupted between Fatah and Hamas in GS. Hamas accused Fatah of carrying out a failed attempt to liquidate it in GS. Eventually, the leaders of the two factions succeeded in containing these events and calming the situation.¹⁴

When the Israeli authorities expelled 415 prominent Palestinian symbols and figures from the WB and GS (among them, 385 Hamas activists) to Marj al-Zuhur in Southern Lebanon on 18/12/1992, the Hamas leadership met in Amman, and found it necessary to meet with Yasir ‘Arafat, to try to take advantage of the PLO’s international connections and secure the return of the expelled. A Hamas delegation, headed by Musa Abu Marzuq, went to Tunisia and over three days held talks focused on the deportees and methods to bring them home, on support and escalation of the *Intifadah*, and on the PLO and how Hamas could join it.¹⁵

On 2/1/1993, in Khartoum, capital of Sudan, a dialogue was conducted between a Fatah delegation, headed by Yasir ‘Arafat, and a Hamas delegation, headed by Musa Abu Marzuq, at the invitation of Hasan al-Turabi. Yasir ‘Arafat was keen not to let Hamas join the PLO except according to his own strict conditions that Hamas rejected.¹⁶

2. Evolution of the Relationship 1993–2000

This period witnessed a halt in the *Intifadah*, the signing of the Oslo Accords, and the establishment of the PA. It is known that the PA was established in the framework of a political settlement that Hamas had rejected from the beginning.

¹³ Ibrahim Ghusheh, *op. cit.*, pp. 160–161.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 172–173.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 175–176.



In its session of 10–12/10/1993 in Tunisia, the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) declared its decision to establish the PA. Its statement said, first: the Executive Committee of the PLO is charged with the formation of the council of the Palestinian National Authority, during the transitional phase, from a number of members from the Executive Committee and a number of others from home and abroad. Second: Mr. Yasir ‘Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO, is to be named chairman of the council of the PA. The PA’s basic law confirmed that the PLO is the PA’s reference.

Hamas took an opposing stance to the PA throughout the years that preceded its participation in the elections of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) that arose from the PA. As for the PA leadership, its animosity towards Hamas meant that it foiled most attempts at creating a favorable environment for negotiating. The PA would invite Hamas to join the PA, while at the same time arresting its supporters in GS and WB. Furthermore, the officials controlling the PLO became the leaders of the PA; and many of those affiliated with Fatah became preoccupied with authority and its privileges. Thus, the Palestinian political system under the self-rule authority was witness to an ambiguous and thorny relationship between the PLO and the PA. This paradox became exacerbated when Hamas’s influence grew during the *Intifadah* years. And so the relationships between Hamas and the PA became characterized by a disparity in their stances toward the fundamentals of the Palestinian issue, a lack of a unified vision, and an absence of consensus on the means to achieve national goals.¹⁷

Despite the fact that the PLO had established the PA in 1994, and provided it with cover and legitimacy, the PA began to grow at the same time as the PLO began its withdraw and retreat, so that with time it started to look like a tool of the PA. The PLO’s leadership (which is also the PA’s leadership) actually and implicitly worked on marginalizing and neglecting the PLO, confining it to the “recovery room” and limiting it to providing “stamp of approval,” only when necessary to legitimize some action or resolution of the PA.

From the founding of the PLO in 1964 and until 1991, the PNC held just 20 sessions. This contravenes its bylaws that call for the council to meet once a year. In the next two decades (until 2013) just one session was held! In other words, the PNC has actually lost its legislative and supervisory role (especially since the

¹⁷ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: al-Fikr wa al-Mumarasah al-Siyasiyyah*, p. 31.



signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993); and it has been marginalized and isolated from Palestinian national decision-making. Furthermore, the PNC session held in April 1996, convened only under American-Israeli pressures to annul those articles in the Palestinian National Charter that were antithetical to Israel and Zionism.

Hamas did not present itself as an alternative to the PLO, but as a Palestinian faction with a different vision of the struggle than that of the PLO, especially Fatah. Gaining power was not one of its goals, according to the statements of Hamas founder, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin; “We do not believe there is a free authority under occupation. That is why we do not think, want or ask for authority in this reality.” One of its leaders, Muhammad Nazzal, had said, “the PA has become a security project to protect Israel.”¹⁸

In such an environment, Hamas activists found themselves in a difficult position, under a Palestinian authority where their past comrades in struggle became the ones to keep them from action and *Jihad*, and where any operation against Israel meant in practice a confrontation with the PA. Hamas has insisted on the continuation of armed resistance, but has considered Palestinian blood a red line not to be crossed. When subjected to the PA’s strikes and prosecutions, Hamas would focus its revenge on Israel. The relationship was three-sided; if Israeli pressure on the PA led to the PA pressure on Hamas, Hamas was inclined to put pressure on the Israeli side through an escalation of armed operations.¹⁹

Hamas has determined certain regulations to deal with such circumstances, including preservation of national unity, striving not to engender any justifications for collision with the PA, avoiding civil war, adopting a constructive opposition aimed at detecting flaws in the peace settlement agreements, preserving the Palestinian people’s rights to their land and holy sites, protection of political freedoms, the right of expression, freedom of the press, and maintaining the Palestinian people’s dignity and vested rights. At the same

¹⁸ Saqr Abu Fakhr, “Second Paper: Hamas and Fatah and the PLO, Misery of the Brothers,” in Mohseh Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *Qira’at Naqdiyyah fi Tajribat Hamas wa Hukumatihā: 2006–2007* (Critical Assessments of the Experience of Hamas & its Government 2006–2007) (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2007), p. 66. Citing Mohammad Abo Khudir interview with Ahmad Yasin posted by *Alrai* newspaper, Kuwait, 7/6/2002; and a lecture at the National Union of Kuwaiti Students in 7/10/2002, *Alrai* posted some of its excerpts in 9/10/2002.

¹⁹ See in details Hafiz ‘Alawi and Hani Sulaiman, *op. cit.*, pp. 225–285.



time, it announced that it is not a party of or bound by the Oslo Accords, that its struggle continues to aim to defeat the Israeli occupation, and that its guns are turned only on the usurper occupiers.²⁰

In practical terms, the PA had to respect its commitments and obligations towards Oslo Accords, and dealt with the resistance operations carried out by Hamas and PIJ as obstacles in the project of building the Palestinian state. Therefore, The PA carried out a campaign of mass arrests in the ranks of Hamas and PIJ, especially after the massive operations of the resistance. Nonetheless, Hamas insisted on its general polices; refused to quit armed resistance, as well as, rejected to indulge into any clashes with the PA.

In the context of clarifying PA practices, Hamas has issued many statements, one of which said, “The PA insists on ignoring all calls to spare Palestinian blood and respect inviolable national principles, through its continued campaign of night raids, detention and torture against our people and the freedom fighters among them; this is in addition to its continuous issuance of unfair sentences and holding of mock and unjust trials in the PA military court.”²¹

In another statement, Hamas accused the PA of violating the sanctity of mosques, and stating that hardly a day was going by without the security forces waging a series of attacks that violate the sanctity of mosques, terrorize worshipers, and destroy their contents and properties, in a manner much similar to the practices of the Israeli occupation.²²

Hamas has confirmed its rejection of the policy of political assassination and the use of violence to resolve disputes between Palestinians. It stressed that its struggle is directed against Israel, and that the self-rule authority is playing a dangerous game by confronting the Palestinian people, their institutions, and their fighting forces “it did not once refrain from accusing the freedom fighters of being agents of foreign powers without a shred of evidence, the accusations being mere fabrications. While it turns a blind eye to thousands of pieces of publicized evidence that confirms its alliance with the Zionists to the degree of receiving commands and dictates from them to suppress the Palestinian people.” Hamas said that the world could still attest to its success in self-control, and in

²⁰ This can be concluded from the published literature and media interviews with Hamas during 1993–1996.

²¹ *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 16/5/1995.

²² *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper, London, 17/8/1995.



restraining its members when they face provocations from the PA and attempts to drag Palestinian society into civil war. Hamas added that it believes that “the political death of the PA and its president is harder on the PA than being assassinated”!²³

In general, the relationship of the PA with the Islamic movement has been characterized by tension. In 1996, there were about one thousand Hamas members and supporters detained in PA prisons, in addition to four thousand others detained in Israeli prisons. However, this tense climate did not prevent attempts on both sides to ease the strain and friction between them. It also did not prevent some Hamas leaders to endeavor, along with a number of PA officials and a number of Fatah leaders, to find common channels to overcome any incidents that may occur; reinforcing common points and avoiding points of contention. Several official and non-official dialogues took place after the PA entered the GS in May 1994. Following the massacre of Palestine Mosque on “Black Friday” in November 1994, a joint committee of the two sides was formed to investigate and overcome the crisis, without achieving any tangible results.²⁴

In August 1995, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, from his prison, called on the Palestinian people to lay down a formula for mutual understanding and for preserving the unity, integrity and future of the people “while maintaining our principled positions and convictions.” He renewed his prohibition of shedding Palestinian blood, viewing turning Palestinian arms on Palestinians as an unforgivable crime.²⁵ On 4/9/1995, Hamas called for a comprehensive and serious national dialogue, binding on all influential groups in the arena, including the government and the opposition. The goal was to reach an understanding that regulated the nature of Palestinian national action.²⁶ The next day the PA welcomed Hamas’s call for dialogue.²⁷ This period witnessed remarkable activity in various circles to promote dialogue. The efforts culminated in the convening of the dialogue in Cairo between the PA and Hamas on 18–21/12/1995, headed by Salim al-Za‘nun on behalf of the PA, and Khalid Mish‘al on behalf of Hamas.

²³ Statement of a Hamas official in 11/4/1996, and a Hamas communiqué on 22/4/1996, see *Filisteen al-Muslima* magazine, London, May 1996. (in Arabic)

²⁴ See *Al Wasat* magazine, London, 25/12/1995.

²⁵ *Alrai* newspaper, Amman, 27/8/1995.

²⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 5/9/1995.

²⁷ *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 6/9/1995.



The PA had sought this meeting, fearing the possibility that Hamas might disrupt or even abort Palestinian self-rule elections in the WB and GS. It tried to persuade Hamas to participate in the elections. It also tried to persuade it to stop its operations against Israel, and to practice its opposition under the auspices of the Oslo Accords without undermining the PA's commitment to the peace process. During this dialogue, Hamas insisted on boycotting the elections, but committed itself to refraining from thwarting it by force or by forcing anyone to boycott it; it also restated its commitment to the continuation of its armed operations against Israel.²⁸

The Cairo dialogue was not without some positive aspects for both parties. The atmosphere of open and serious dialogue contributed to reducing differences and identifying their details, and worked towards avoiding a collision between the two parties. The two delegations agreed to emphasize national unity on the basis of political pluralism, the prohibition of infighting, the adoption of dialogue between various Palestinian parties, and the formation of a joint committee to deal with contingent problems, an emphasis on creating an atmosphere that deepened trust, cooperation to achieve national goals, and striving for the release of prisoners in Israeli jails.²⁹

Unfortunately, not all the attempts at dialogue succeeded in achieving their goals, and there were repeated arrests by the PA of its interlocutors from Hamas. A number of them were tortured in PA jails, some of whom had even participated in the Cairo dialogue, like Hasan Yusuf, 'Abdul Fattah Dukhan, Muhammad Sham'a and Jamal Salim.³⁰

Muhammad Nazzal, Hamas's representative in Jordan during that period, believed that dialogue was the civilized method that all should have resorted to in order to reach an agreement, "Regarding our dialogues with Fatah in Khartoum, Tunisia, Amman and inside Palestine, they did not achieve what we aspired for and wanted; for Hamas did not feel that the other side is seriously interested in solving the problems that exist between the two parties, or even has the desire to apply what has been reached on the ground"³¹

²⁸ See *Addustour*, 23/12/1995; and *Alrai*, Amman, 24/12/1995.

²⁹ *Addustour*, 23/12/1995.

³⁰ See for example an interview with Khalid Mish'al, *Filisteen al-Muslima*, August 1996.
(in Arabic)

³¹ *Addustour*, 30/8/1994.



In a statement published in 1996, Mish‘al considered that future relations between Hamas and PA, or rather between the Palestinian people and the PA was “not a reassuring future, because the PA has made it conditional on its relationship with the enemy, and subjected it to the Zionist mood and priorities, and gave precedence to the enemy’s interests and demands over the interests of our people, their national unity, and the cohesion of their social fabric.”³²

Nevertheless, since 1996, the PA no longer felt the need to dialogue with Hamas and opposition forces, particularly as it had been able to exert its control over its territories, and managed to thwart tens of operations that Hamas and the opposition forces had tried to execute. The repressive security language was the PA’s common language in dealing with Hamas for most of the period between 1996 and until the outbreak of the *al-Aqsa Intifadah*.

3. Evolution of the Relationship 2000–2005

During the period 2000–2005, *al-Aqsa Intifadah* gave the resistance movement much credibility and proved the truth of its expectations. Once again Hamas became a central player in the Palestinian arena, which cannot be bypassed. This encouraged the movement within Fatah, which calls for armed resistance, to join the uprising; thus al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades of Fatah was established.

Consequently, there was a call for an inter-Palestinian dialogue; which was, for the PA and Egypt (which entered with force on the scene), to stop the *Intifadah* or declare a truce, in order that negotiations could continue. Hamas welcomed the dialogue in an effort to find a new common national program, based on defeating the occupation; in spite of the fact that Hamas, PIJ, and the rest of the resistance movement knew that the next objective of stopping the *Intifadah* was to strike the infrastructure of the resistance and crush the resistance movements.

Holding negotiations was in itself a practical admission from the leadership of the PLO and PA of their inability to make critical and effective decisions on the ground without referring to the resistance movement, Hamas in particular. Egypt took advantage of its great weight in the Arab world and its special relations with the PA, Israel and the US, in addition to its openness to the Palestinian opposition,

³² *Filisteen al-Muslima*, August 1996.



to call for these discussions. Thus, the most important of these negotiations between Fatah and Hamas took place on 10–13/11/2002 and in January 2003, with the participation of all Palestinian factions, and on 4–7/12/2003, again with the participation of all the Palestinian factions. These dialogues may have contributed to the convergence of views. However, the PA failed to get what it wanted, especially since the resistance factions remained uncommitted to the Oslo Accords and their aftermath.³³

Hamas did not question the legitimacy of the PLO itself, but it held the view that the Executive Committee, the Central Council, and the PNC were old institutions, the validity of which had expired years ago. Accordingly, these institutions' decisions no longer reflected Palestinian legitimacy and fundamental needs, and they no longer truly represented the Palestinian people. Therefore, Hamas's position was to emphasize respect for the PLO and its decisions, but after rectifying, activating and restructuring it as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Mahmud Ramahi, a Hamas leaders in the WB, stressed that the current leadership of PLO no longer represented all Palestinians; he accused some Palestinian parties of hindering the restructuring of the PLO in order to prevent Hamas from participating in it, and described the PLO's decisions thus:

Biased towards one party and against another, saturated with the spirit of partisanship and they sow seeds of discord and division within Palestinian society, especially if they were issued by those who have no democratic qualification, or those who have been occupying their positions for a long time, and were not chosen in free elections. He pointed out that some members of the Executive Committee no longer represent even their own factions, because they were expelled from them. Thus these decisions have no value and cannot contribute to solving the problems.³⁴

The Cairo Agreement, which was concluded on 17/3/2005 between all the Palestinian factions, was an important milestone on Hamas's path toward joining the PLO. In its closing statement, it says the following: "Those gathered agreed to develop the Palestine Liberation Organization on bases that will be settled upon in order to include all the Palestinian powers and factions, as the

³³ There was a full media coverage of the meetings, see for example the media during the date of meetings in *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, Sharjah. (in Arabic)

³⁴ *Al-Khaleej*, 29/3/2005.



organization is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.” This item, which was approved by Hamas, opened the way to dialogue for the sake of achieving this goal. It also charges the members of the Executive Committee with a crucial part of the responsibility for their lack of a serious quest for the implementation of this resolution.³⁵

After attending a meeting in Cairo headed by President Mahmud ‘Abbas, Hamas and PIJ became members in a certain PLO framework for the first time. The meeting was also attended by the secretaries-general of Palestinian factions, members of the PLO Executive Committee, the PNC Speaker, as well as some independent figures. It was called the Interim Leadership Framework and was charged with the reactivation and development of the organization’s structures, until new PNC elections were held. The meeting was considered consent by Hamas to join the PLO. Isma‘il Radwan, a Hamas leader who participated in the Cairo meeting, said that, “his movement and all the factions agree to join the organization after rectifying and restructuring it.” Radwan pointed out that Hamas and the PIJ had become members of PLO’s Interim Leadership Framework. Under an agreement signed in 2005 by the Palestinian factions, it was agreed that this framework would be entrusted with supervising the development of PLO institutions on democratic bases, and it would oversee PNC elections in the WB, GS, and in places where elections are permitted abroad.³⁶

A committee was formed of members of the Executive Committee, PNC Speaker, and the secretaries-general of the national and Islamic factions and forces and their representatives, to discuss ways for Hamas to join PLO institutions. In the wake of the meeting, PNC Speaker Salim al-Za‘nun, stated that Hamas has come to be “in principle, within the PLO,” and expressed the hope that “the process of developing and activating the organization will be achieved without disputes.” However, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri, denied that the movement had joined the PLO; rather it agreed to participate in the committee agreed upon during the Cairo dialogue.³⁷

³⁵ *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 17/3/2005; and Text of the Palestinian “Cairo Declaration,” site of Palestine Media Center (PMC), Statements, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070704163620/http://www.palestine-pmc.com/details.asp?cat=2&id=849>

³⁶ *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 23/12/2011.

³⁷ *Al-Hayat*, 30/3/2005.



During 2005, there was a Palestinian consensus, almost unanimity, on the view that the number of PNC members should number approximately 300; half of them were to be from WB and GS, and the other half from the Palestinian Diaspora (Palestinians abroad). These remarks were repeatedly made by al-Za‘nun and his deputy Taysir Qubba‘a. There were no objections from Fatah, Hamas, or any others, to the proposed number. Al-Za‘nun stressed that the half from inside were to be chosen through elections; as for those abroad, they would be elected, but if this proved impossible, they would be chosen by consensus.³⁸

4. Evolution of the Relationship 2006–2013

On 25/1/2006, Hamas’s landslide victory in the PLC elections, 74 seats to 45 for Fatah, shocked the mainstream that led the PLO and controlled the PNC (Fatah branch). This led to PNC Speaker al-Za‘nun, (a member of the Central Committee of the Fatah movement) to deliver some strange and surprising statements that were in contrast to what he had previously declared. On 4/2/2006, he presided over a meeting in the PNC headquarters in which more than 100 personalities participated, members of the PNC and Fatah cadres in Jordan. Al-Za‘nun stressed that the PNC would continue its work in spite of financial hardship; and that it would defend each of its members, and would not allow, under any circumstance, harm to come to any member, protecting its numbers and its structure. Al-Za‘nun also said, “We will maintain the National Council as it is now, and I will defend the “national” [the word used in the description of the council] until the last drop of blood in my body.”³⁹

In opening PLC session on 16/2/2006, al-Za‘nun declared that the 132 members of the PLC would be added to the 783 members of the PNC! To say the least, this move spoilt the atmosphere of PLO reform and it meant that the elected members would be lost in a sea of appointed members.

Immediately after the PLC elections, President ‘Abbas stressed that the negotiation dossier will be returned to the PLO, the reference of the self-rule authority and its government, regardless of which political power is leading the government. For on the one hand, the president sought to isolate Hamas from the negotiation file, and on the other, to impose the PLO’s political agenda on the government. ‘Abbas transferred the responsibility for overseeing Palestinian

³⁸ See *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 28/7/2005; and site of Arabs 48, 4/7/2005, <http://www.arabs48.com>

³⁹ *Addustour*, 6/2/2006.



embassies abroad from the PA Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the PLO; after he had removed it himself few months earlier from the PLO's jurisdictions. Thus the PLO reform file stumbled, because some Palestinian, Arab and international parties feared the possibility of Hamas dominating the PLO after winning the PLC elections in WB and GS early.

However, some voices within Fatah demanded that the popular will be respected and Hamas be given its full chance. Hussam Khader, a Fatah leader, stated that, “we [meaning the PLO, Fatah and the PA] should prepare not only for a partnership with Hamas, but also for its leadership of the PLO.” He pointed out that Hamas’s resistance to the occupation grants it legitimacy to participate in the organization and even to lead it.⁴⁰ However, the overwhelming tendency among the Fatah leadership was to disrupt, obstruct and disarm the powers of the Hamas-led government.

The program of the new Hamas government, headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah, led to confrontations between Hamas and the PLO leadership, Fatah and the PA. The PLO Executive Committee demanded that the government amend its program, noting that “it does not acknowledge the reference of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people,” and does not adopt the program and the commitments of the PLO and the PA. The Executive Committee announced that “the political practice of any Palestinian government must be based on the PLO program, the Declaration of Independence of 1988, and the PLO decisions and its Arab and international obligations;” arguing that “any departure from this approach exposes our national achievements, including the consolidation of the PA institutions and expanding its role on the ground, to real threats and it challenges its legitimacy.”⁴¹

The Executive Committee also demanded that the Hamas “government respects the Palestinian national consensus because it is not acceptable that the government avoids recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people,” and that “it is not reasonable that this organization is recognized by the United Nations and by more than 120 countries, while the Hamas government refuses to recognize it as the political reference of our people.”⁴² A member of the PLO Executive Committee, Zakariya al-Agha, said

⁴⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 23/3/2006.

⁴¹ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 23/3/2006.

⁴² *Al-Hayat*, 23/3/2006.



“the Executive Committee has decided to ask Hamas to amend its political program and to say clearly that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people of whom Hamas is a part and not a substitute for the organization.”

As for Hamas, it considered the PLC to be the body authorized to make decisions on the subject of the government, and not the PLO Executive Committee. It also noted that the technocratic and functional nature of the PA government’s task did not oblige it to take political stances; it should seek to avoid some of the disputed political issues that did not in practice have an effect on the ability of the government carrying out its functions.

In Damascus, on 28/3/2006, a meeting of all Palestinian factions, including Hamas, was held to agree on steps to rebuild the PLO. Mish‘al said, “With respect to the PLO, we agreed to these steps in order to rebuild it, and this is the real patriotic position.” Taysir Qubba‘a, Deputy Speaker of the PNC, read a statement at the conclusion of the meeting, calling for the formation of a committee to follow up on the decisions taken by the Palestinians in Cairo in March 2005 on “rebuilding the PLO.” Hamas confirmed that it had agreed to join the organization, after a meeting between a Hamas leader, Mahmud Zahhar, and Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas. Zahhar said that there was a firm decision to participate in the PLO, although there remained differences between them on the Palestinian National Charter on the basis of which Hamas will join, and on the mechanism of determining the rate of participation of Hamas in the PNC and other PLO institutions. Zahhar added that the entry of Hamas into the PLO would strengthen it and restore its soul, after it had moved away from the Palestinian fundamentals.⁴³

Following the formation of the Hamas government, and amid conflicts of jurisdictions, disruption and siege in the Palestinian arena, in May 2006 prisoners of various Palestinian factions including Fatah, Hamas and the PIJ signed the National Accord Document, which emphasized national unity and the necessity of PA and the PLO reform. In Article Seven, the document stated that “Running negotiations is the responsibility of the PLO and the National Authority president based on adhering to and achieving the Palestinian national goals. Any crucial agreement should be presented to the new Palestine National Council to be

⁴³ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 29/3/2006.



ratified or to hold a referendum on it wherever possible.”⁴⁴ After lengthy discussions among Palestinian factions and community leaders, an amended document was issued on 28/6/2006, retaining most of its texts, while keeping a kind of ambiguity that invited different interpretations, on which Fatah, Hamas and the other factions can base. The Articles related to the negotiating process remained, with an addition to Article Four to the effect that comprehensive Palestinian political efforts must preserve the rights and fundamentals of the Palestinian people.

In the period 6–8/2/2007, intensive meetings were held that led to “the Mecca Agreement” between Fatah and Hamas. This agreement stressed the sanctity of Palestinian blood, forming a Palestinian government of national unity, and moving forward with the process of developing and reforming the PLO. It also stressed the principles of political partnership and political pluralism.⁴⁵

Haniyyah presented his new cabinet to President ‘Abbas on 15/3/2007, and he approved it. Then on 17/3/2007, the government won a vote of confidence from the PLC. Haniyyah gave a speech before the PLC that was considered a working program for the new government, in which it was stated that the management of negotiations was the prerogative of the PLO.

The formation of a national unity government led to a spread of optimism that the siege might be lifted, the period of lawlessness ended, and made Palestinians proceed towards implementing the Mecca Agreement, which was founded on the basis of political partnership between Fatah and Hamas (as well as the other factions and blocks). Although the agreement clearly included three areas: the government, its ministries and its affiliated bodies, the security forces, and the PLO, it soon became clear that the Palestinian presidency and the influential figures in Fatah had another understanding of political partnership, i.e. that it was confined to the government and its ministries, and does not include security

⁴⁴ See Mohsen Mohammad Saleh and Wael Sa‘ad (eds.), *al-Watha’iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2006* (Palestinian Documents for the Year 2006) (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2008), p. 364; and on reactions to the document, see *Al-Hayat* and *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 12/5/2006; and the full text in: *Assafir*, 27/5/2006. (in Arabic)

⁴⁵ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh and Wael Sa‘ad (eds.), *al-Watha’iq al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2007* (Palestinian Documents for the Year 2007) (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2009), p. 122.

See document no. 13 in the appendix of the book: Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah (Hamas): Dirasat fi al-Fikr wa al-Tajrubah* (Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas): Studies of Thought and Experience), p. 612.



forces or the PLO, which were viewed to be the exclusive prerogative of the Palestinian presidency. This contradiction weakened the new government and no meeting was held to discuss the activation of the PLO and its institutions.⁴⁶

In a press statement published by Quds Press International News Agency on 7/5/2007, Usama Hamdan, the head of International Relations in Hamas, pinpointed three points that he considered fundamental to reforming the PLO; first: the need for the reform process to be founded on a political, institutional and democratic basis, second: everyone should participate in rebuilding the organization, with no one exempt, and no party should be given the right to reject the participation of any other Palestinian party in the rebuilding, and third: the process of choosing representatives of the Palestinian people in the PLO should be done by direct elections, and the Palestinian people should enjoy freedom of choice and oversight, without the PLO becoming a hotbed of quotas and biddings as this would lead to the spread of corruption, and then to the collapse of PLO institutions. Another condition set by Hamas for joining the organization was agreement on a new national charter. Especially after the 1998 visit by US President Bill Clinton, when the PNC amended most of the items in the Charter which called for struggle against Israel. Consequently, Hamdan demanded that the PLO's political platform stem from this charter, and be approved by the PNC, which would be charged with monitoring its implementation.⁴⁷

Hamdan said that with regard to the PLO institutionally, it had executive and legislative institutions. Regarding the legislative institution, it was suspended (the PNC); and regarding the executive institution, PLO departments such as the Department of Culture and Information, the Military, the Palestinian National Fund and others, had been undermined in favor of PA institutions, when Fatah was leading the PA. Hamadan saw that there was a need to "rebuild PLO institutions from the ground up." He said:

We in Hamas believe that addressing the democratic dimension in PLO institutions should be based on activating the democratic principle within these institutions. Previously, the PNC used to be formed in accordance with the quota system, in a way that ensures the dominance of a certain faction

⁴⁶ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007* (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2010), p. 39.

⁴⁷ Quds Press International News Agency, London, 7/5/2007, <http://www.qudsspress.com>; and see also site of The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 12/5/2007, <http://www.palinfo.com/site/pic/newsdetails.aspx?itemid=9090> (in Arabic)



over it. We believe that the perfect formula is for the council to be elected by the Palestinian people at home and abroad. This would strengthen democracy in Palestinian society and would also create an oversight mechanism on the executive track and the factions' performance.⁴⁸

The national unity government formed in March 2007 did not last long, as differences between Fatah and Hamas soon led to armed conflict in GS. Hamas seized control of GS after clashes in what it described as a preemptive strike against elements within Fatah acting to overthrow the Hamas-led government. It was said that in the period 11–14/6/2007, 116 were killed and 550 wounded.⁴⁹ The statistics of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights indicate that, due to the preemptive strike, 161 people were killed in the period 7–16/6/2007, among them 43 civilians, 91 members of Fatah and the security forces affiliated with it, and 27 from Hamas, Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades and the Executive Force.⁵⁰ While Hamas took control in GS, Fatah was able to take control of the WB.

Hamas considered what it did a legitimate and necessary action. That it was done under orders from the PA prime minister, who was also the Interior Minister, supported by the majority of the PLC, in the face of a strategy of lawlessness, under the protection of PA security forces (and influential forces in Fatah), which refused to obey the instructions of its government. It also held the view that the caretaker government led by Haniyyah was the legitimate government in accordance with the Palestinian Basic Law.⁵¹ But President 'Abbas and his supporters considered that Hamas had carried out a "bloody, black coup;" that there was no way to come to terms with Hamas unless it recanted, and declared its commitment to Palestinian, Arab and international "legitimacy." And in a speech on 18/7/2007 in front of the PLO Central Council, he announced the end of the Cairo Agreement declared on 17/3/2005.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Al-Hayat, 23/6/2006.

⁵⁰ Palestine Center for Human Rights (PCHR), "Black Pages in the Absence of Justice: A Report on the Bloody Events Witnessed by the Gaza Strip 7–14 June 2007," pp. 87–95, http://pchrgaza.org/files/Reports/English/pdf_spec/Gaza%20Conflict%20-%20Eng%209%20October..pdf

⁵¹ See Khalid Mish'al Meeting the Press in Doha, *al-Watan* newspaper, Doha, and *al-Hayat*, 22/7/2007. (in Arabic)

⁵² Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007*, p. 56.



And as Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh said:

Recurrently, the trust-building process has suffered harsh blows. As while President ‘Abbas was charging Haniyyah with forming the government, he was stripping the government of its most important authorities in security, media, foreign affairs and administrative appointments... This is how “armed” negotiations eventually took the place of the “table” ones. Things became complicated in mid-May 2007, reaching their climax in mid-June, when Hamas was able to control the Gaza Strip. This caused a break and an intense crisis of trust between the two parties.⁵³

The inclination of the Palestinian presidency to drive Hamas out of areas of legitimacy necessitated ignoring and bypassing the PLC, in which Hamas enjoyed a majority. It was essential for the presidency to have an alternative reference to lend legitimacy to its decisions, so it resorted to the PLO and its institutions. Suddenly the PLO became present on a daily basis; although, over the previous years, it had almost always forced to be absent. And so its institutions began to meet, discuss and decide on the PA’s daily affairs, despite the fact that it had been generally agreed that it should not have executive or legislative functions but be solely a reference to the PA on major issues.⁵⁴

In line with this trend, the PLO Executive Committee held an emergency meeting that started on the first day Hamas-led government seized full control over GS on 14/6/2007; several recommendations were approved and given to President ‘Abbas for approval. These were:

- a. Dismissal of Isma‘il Haniyyah’s government (dismissal of a government being a president’s right.)
- b. Declaration of a state of emergency.
- c. Forming a government to enforce this state of emergency.
- d. Holding early elections.⁵⁵

Immediately, President ‘Abbas adopted these recommendations and issued three decrees for their implementation.

⁵³ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Experience of Dialogue Between Fatah and Hamas, Where is the Problem?*.

⁵⁴ Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007*, p. 53.

⁵⁵ See Arabs 48, 14/6/2007; and *al-Hayat*, 15/6/2007.



In July 2007, Fatah tried to change the PLC leadership, but failed. It also did not succeed in exploiting Israel's arrest of Hamas deputies to form an alternative majority. Thus it fell back on the option of the PLO; and on 18/7/2007 the PCC convened, President 'Abbas called for the approval of holding early presidential and legislative elections, on the basis of proportional list representation. He also announced the end of the Cairo Agreement, signed by all the Palestinian factions in which they had agreed to rebuild and develop the PLO).

Hamas responded by saying that President 'Abbas did not have the constitutional authority to hold early elections, and stressed its commitment to the Mecca and Cairo Agreements.⁵⁶ During a meeting with reporters in Qatar, Khalid Mish'al stated that Hamas absolutely refused to disregard existing Palestinian Legitimacies by concentrating only on the legitimacy of the presidency and ignoring the legitimacy of the PLC and the elected government. He added that Hamas refused to use PLO institutions as an alternative point of reference to the PLC.⁵⁷

This disagreement crippled the PLC. Furthermore, on 2/9/2007, President 'Abbas proceeded to adopt a new election law, which imposed on each candidate for parliament or the presidency an advance commitment to the political position of the PLO. This, therefore, prevented anyone in the opposition from exercising their right to run for election, and led to having a legislative council made up of one political color. This is a stance that does not allow compromise and mutual understanding, since Hamas is not a member of the PLO, and opposes many of its decisions and policies.⁵⁸

The conditions that were set by President 'Abbas, the PA in Ramallah and Fatah to start a dialogue with Hamas were:

- a. Undo the "coup" in GS and apologize to the Palestinian people.
- b. Recognize the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians, abide by the agreements it had signed, and accept the legitimacies it has accepted.

⁵⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 20/7/2007.

⁵⁷ See *Al-Watan*, Doha, and *al-Hayat*, 22/7/2007.

⁵⁸ See *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 3/9/2007.



The grounds upon which the agreement with Hamas was to be based were:

- a. To reach an agreement that did not isolate the Palestinian leadership or government, and did not lead to the resumption of blockade of the Palestinian people.
- b. To hold early presidential and legislative elections.

Fatah refused to have a bilateral dialogue with Hamas, preferring to grant itself wider legitimacy and greater impetus by sending a delegation on behalf of the PLO to dialogue with them, or by convening dialogue sessions in the presence of all the factions. While Hamas saw that the essence of the problem was between itself and Fatah, and that the two of them should first hold a direct dialogue to resolve core issues before expanding the circle of dialogue to include others. Hamas spokesman, Sami Abu Zuhri, commented, “We consider ourselves not interested in the committee formed of PLO factions to deal with the issue of dialogue. For the dialogue is not between Hamas and the PLO, but between Hamas and Fatah; and it could evolve into a national dialogue, in which all Palestinian factions can participate.”⁵⁹ Hamas insisted that the dialogue be without preconditions, that all relevant issues should be discussed, and that all political prisoners should be released. Hamas also refused advance recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Hamas believed it should first be reformed and activated. Hamas was not about to commit itself to the agreements signed by the PLO, especially those that conflicted with fundamental Palestinian rights, the right to resistance and those that related to recognition of Israel.

Talk about the Fatah-Hamas dialogue and putting the Palestinian political house in order occupied most of 2008; however, the atmosphere of accusation, mistrust and preconditions remained prevalent throughout that year. On 5/6/2008, President ‘Abbas met with the PLO Executive Committee in the presence of factional representatives, and renewed his call for dialogue, using conciliatory language, free of accusations. Soon President ‘Abbas requested that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak launch an inter-Palestinian dialogue under the patronage of Egypt. Hamas welcomed the dialogue.

⁵⁹ PIC, 8/6/2008.



By the end of September 2008, there were reports that Cairo had prepared a paper of five sections to be presented to the Palestinian dialogue; and that there was almost consensus on four of these sections, all concerned with not resorting to violence, the formation of a national consensus government, rehabilitation of the security forces, and rehabilitation of the PLO. The fifth section was about fixing a date for presidential and legislative elections.⁶⁰

The dialogue stalled when Hamas, along with three other Palestinian factions, apologized for not attending the reconciliation conference, which was scheduled on 10/11/2008 and demanded the release of detainees in the WB, that its delegation from the WB be allowed to attend. It also asked that ‘Abbas participate in all the dialogue sessions, and not just be present at the opening ceremony.⁶¹ This demand aroused Egypt’s anger and resentment within Fatah. The PLO Executive Committee charged Hamas with “full responsibility” for the failure of the Cairo meeting.⁶² The PCC, in spite of the reservations about its validity, supported President ‘Abbas by electing him president of the State of Palestine on 23/11/2008, shortly before the end of his term as president of the PA, to let this be a “leverage” for him in the face of what Hamas and his opponents might do.

The Israeli aggression on GS (27/12/2008–18/1/2009) was a major turning point, as the heroic steadfastness of the people and the resistance frustrated the hopes of some that Hamas might fall. Furthermore, the overwhelming Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and even international public sympathy restored momentum to Hamas and the resistance movement. It brought Hamas out of the corner it had been squeezed in to, as a result of its nonparticipation in the national dialogue in Cairo in autumn 2008, thus accusing it of causing the dialogue to abort. Moreover, some analysts say that the lackluster and confused performance of the PLO leadership and PA put the Fatah leadership and the government of Salam Fayyad in an awkward position. There were increasing calls in Fatah and PA circles for dialogue and putting the Palestinian political house in order and for an end to the campaigns of mutual incitements. In addition, the PA froze the peace process with Israel.

⁶⁰ *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah, 30/9/2008.

⁶¹ See statement Khalil al-Hayyeh, *Felesteen* newspaper, 12/11/2008. (in Arabic)

⁶² *Annahar* newspaper, Beirut, 13/11/2008.



This lethargic performance by the PLO leadership and the stumbling reform and reconstruction process, prompted Khalid Mish‘al—in a celebration held in Doha on 28/1/2009, after its victory in the Cast Lead war—to declare that Hamas “is working with all factions to build a Palestinian reference that preserves the right of return and holds on to the rights and fundamentals.”⁶³ Mish‘al’s remarks caused a storm in the Palestinian political arena. Figures in Fatah and its close circles used them to attack Hamas, taking advantage of the Palestinian people’s feelings regarding their traditional desire for unity and for the PLO as their moral house. Some saw it as an opportunity to undermine Hamas, which had reached the height of its popularity after its steadfastness in the Cast Lead war. Some PA and Fatah leaders pledged to confront Hamas “which is trying to bury the PLO.”⁶⁴ They stated that “Mish‘al’s attempts will fail,” Fatah would confront “the Iranian conspiracy,”⁶⁵ Hamas “from the start, has refused to engage in the Palestinian national action,”⁶⁶ and that Mish‘al statement constituted “an unacceptable and despicable conspiracy and a coup against the PLO.”⁶⁷

Thus, the controversy took on a hostile and provocative character, but did not address head on the reasons for the miserable state that the PLO had reached. Such crucial issues included the need to as who was benefiting from the suspension of the PLO’s legislative institutions and executive departments, turning it into a mere tool in the hands of a certain faction, placing it in the recovery room to be awakened whenever there was a need to provide the “stamp of approval,” to legitimize some action or resolution of the PA. Muhammad Nazzal, a member of Hamas’s political bureau, explained that Mish‘al did not mean to call for the abolition of the PLO or find a substitute for it; but he meant to call for finding a framework for the Palestinian factions, which are excluded from joining the organization, to coordinate among themselves.⁶⁸

In general, after the war on GS, Egypt was quick to agree to sponsor the dialogue, striving as far as possible to create the appropriate conditions for its success. It launched the dialogue process with meetings between Fatah and Hamas on 24–25/2/2009, followed by the participation of other factions on

⁶³ *Felesteen*, 29/1/2009.

⁶⁴ Statement of Saeb ‘Uraiqat, *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 30/1/2009. (in Arabic)

⁶⁵ Statement of Hussein al-Sheikh, *Asharq Alawsat*, 30/1/2009. (in Arabic)

⁶⁶ Statement of ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, *Aljazeera.net*, 29/1/2009. (in Arabic)

⁶⁷ A PNC Statement, *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 1/2/2009. (in Arabic)

⁶⁸ *Asharq Alawsat*, 3/2/2009.



26/2/2009. Five committees were formed to address five issues: elections, security, the PLO, the transitional government, and national reconciliation.

Whatever the case may be, the PLO has become a key item in the Palestinian dialogue dossier. It was the subject of extensive discussions during the six sessions of Palestinian national dialogue in the first half of 2009. An agreement was reached on the points related to its reformation. However, in the summer of 2009, the Fatah leadership showed a desire to fill the vacant seats on the Executive Committee, which had lost quorum due to the death or absence of a number of its members. That was a negative indicator for Hamas and the factions concerned with rebuilding and reorganizing the PLO on new bases. This coincided with putting finishing touches to the understandings related to Palestinian reconciliation, chiefly the issue of the PLO. It would have been more appropriate for these factions not to rush to open the issue of filling vacancies without consensus, make arrangements that consecrate the dominance of Fatah to the exclusion of the others and continue its use as a tool in the face of the opposition.⁶⁹

However, Fatah saw no reason to wait an indeterminate time for the reconciliation to be put into effect. It saw a need to make arrangements, even temporary ones, to put in motion the minimum functions of the PLO, which, no matter what is said about it, remained regionally and internationally the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Indeed, Salim al-Za‘nun called for an extraordinary emergency session of the council on 25/8/2009 in the presidential headquarters in Ramallah, where six members of the Executive Committee were elected to replace the six members who had died.⁷⁰ The council was held in the presence of 325 members out of more than 700 members, who have been registered members since the Council of 1996.

Egypt submitted a proposal for the final text of the reconciliation agreement, “the Egyptian paper,” composed of nearly 4,100 words on 22 pages. The paper provided for the activation and development of the PLO on bases to be agreed upon, so that it would include all Palestinian forces and factions. A new PNC would be formed, that would ensure a wide representation of Palestinians at

⁶⁹ On Hamas Position, see statement of Sami Abu Zihri, *Al-Khaleej*, 18/8/2009 (in Arabic); the Statement of the Palestinian Government in GS, PIC, 18/8/2009 (in Arabic); and Hamas Statement, *Okaz*, 22/8/2009. (in Arabic)

⁷⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 25/8/2009.



home and abroad. The committee in charge of developing the PLO would complete its formation, and would hold its first meeting as soon as it started the implementation of this agreement. It had the task of determining the relationship between the institutions, structures and functions of the PLO and the PA, so as to maintain the PLO as a reference of the PA, while ensuring that there would be no duplication. And until the new PNC was elected, the functions of the committee would be to lay the foundations and mechanisms of the new council, address crucial issues related to political and national affairs, make decisions about them by consensus, and follow up the implementation of the decisions reached during the dialogue.

“The Egyptian paper” stipulated the formation of a 16-member committee from Fatah, Hamas, the factions and the independents. Fatah and Hamas would name eight members each. Then President Mahmud ‘Abbas would issue a presidential decree for its formation, after a consensus on its members had been reached. He would then become the reference of this committee in his capacity as chairman of the PLO and the PA. The committee was to be a coordinating framework without any political commitments or benefits; it would start its work immediately after the signing of the agreement and end it in the aftermath of elections and the formation of a new Palestinian government.

The paper emphasized that on 28/6/2010, elections for the PLC, the presidency, and the PNC in the WB including Jerusalem and the GS would be held simultaneously; and that everyone would abide by their outcome. The PNC elections would be held on the basis of full proportional representation, at home and abroad wherever possible; while the PLC elections were to be held on the basis of a mixed system, 75% lists, 25% electoral districts, with a 2% qualifying threshold.

Egypt asked Hamas and Fatah to sign “the Egyptian paper” before 15/10/2009. Then, in the climate surrounding the scandal of the PLO leadership and Fatah’s mishandling of the Goldstone Report on the Israeli aggression on GS, Fatah was quick to agree; while Hamas asked for time to review the text. Hamas presented a number of amendments, which it insisted should be included in the text of the Egyptian paper or be placed in an annex to the text, so that it gained legal and political authority. One of the most important remarks was that the interim leadership scheduled to be formed until the reelection of the PLO institutions



“may not be subject to suspension,” and that the election committee should be formed by President Mahmud ‘Abbas in “concurrence” with Hamas.

The leadership of Fatah and the PA in Ramallah benefited from the signing of the Egyptian paper, and from Hamas refraining to do so, as it allowed them to get out of the predicament caused by the scandal of their postponing the vote on the Goldstone Report. It also enabled them to wage a broad media campaign against Hamas, accusing it of hampering the efforts to achieve national unity and reconciliation. Fatah also benefited from the sincere Palestinian, Arab and international desire to achieve reconciliation, and used it to attempt to squeeze Hamas into a corner. As for Hamas, it refused to sign under duress, and insisted on matching the text to what had been agreed upon in the minutes of the previous sessions. However, the Egyptian government and the Fatah movement refused to open the paper for discussion or for any amendments thereto. Thus, the reconciliation project continued to face hindrance, while all attempts by parties such as PFLP and independent personalities such as Munib al-Masri, failed to find appropriate solutions. There were also mediation efforts by Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Libya, which continued until just prior to the Arab Summit in Sirte in Libya, in late March 2010, but yielded no results.

These circumstances prompted Mahmud ‘Abbas, on 23/10/2009, to issue a presidential decree specifying 24/1/2010 as the date for presidential and legislative elections.⁷¹ This was interpreted as a bypassing of Hamas, an attempt to impose specific routes for Palestinian action, and an attempt to put pressure on Hamas to sign the Egyptian paper. The PCC announced its support for the election decree.⁷² Fatah considered the decree an imperative constitutional requirement that paved the way for returning to the people to find a way out of the crisis. However, Hamas rejected the elections decree. ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Dwaik, PLC speaker, said that the decree required the approval of the parliament, especially that there were 110 deputies present, and there was a parliamentary majority for the convening of any PLC session,⁷³ while the PA in Ramallah prevents it from taking place. Deputy Speaker Ahmad Bahar, he said that ‘Abbas had no “legal or national status.”⁷⁴ A statement by Hamas said that ‘Abbas has

⁷¹ Palestine News and Information Agency (WAFA), 23/10/2009.

⁷² Reuters News agency, 25/10/2010, <http://ara.reuters.com/> (in Arabic)

⁷³ *Felesteen*, 25/10/2009.

⁷⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 6/10/2010.



“brushed aside all efforts to reach a national reconciliation and end the schism,” and reiterated its rejection of the decree, considering it illegal, because “‘Abbas has lost his legitimacy, and ended his legal tenure.”⁷⁵

The PCC tried to provide cover for failing to hold the elections on time; so on 16/12/2009, it decided to extend the mandate of the PA president as well as that of the PLC, until general presidential and legislative elections were held in the WB and GS.⁷⁶ PCC decisions did not provide cover for President ‘Abbas only, but also sought to provide cover for the PLC; perhaps so the fact that their support goes only to the presidency would be obscured, and so that the schism would not become wider. But on the other hand, it is possible that this could be understood as an abuse of powers and an imposition of a guardianship that was not theirs. Hamas said that the PCC did not have the constitutional validity to extend the term of President ‘Abbas, because it was “an illegal body” that “arises from bodies with expired terms.”⁷⁷

The disruption of national reconciliation continued throughout 2010. However, this file witnessed a new breakthrough after a meeting in Mecca, which took place between Mish‘al and ‘Omar Suleiman, director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Services (EGIS), who said he was not opposed to an agreement between Fatah and Hamas on understandings that take into account Hamas’s reservations about the Egyptian Paper.⁷⁸ Then on 24/9/2010, a dialogue was held in Damascus, during which most of Hamas’s remarks were accepted, except those linked to the security aspect. The delegations of the two factions met again in Damascus on 9/11/2010, without reaching the desired result.

The changes taking place in the Arab world since the beginning of 2011 contributed to increasing the pressure for Palestinian reconciliation. Positive signs emerged through an invitation extended by Isma‘il Haniyyah to ‘Abbas to visit the GS, and the latter’s consent to do so.

However, Fatah and Hamas’s signing of the reconciliation agreement in Cairo on 3/5/2011 (celebrated the next day), which took in to account the remarks of

⁷⁵ Arabs 48, 23/10/2009.

⁷⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 17/12/2009.

⁷⁷ See statement of Fawi Barhum, *Felsteen*, 17/12/2009 (in Arabic); and statement of Musa Abu Marzuq, *Assabeeb* newspaper, Amman, 26/12/2009. (in Arabic)

⁷⁸ *Al-Hayat*, 6/10/2010.



Hamas, and resolved the security problem, constituted an important milestone on the path of Palestinian national unity.

The path to reconciliation has once again become a faltering process. And in order to reactivate it, a meeting took place between ‘Abbas and Mish‘al on 23/11/2011 in Cairo, where the beginning of a true national partnership was announced and an intra-Palestinian reconciliation.⁷⁹ ‘Azzam al-Ahmad announced that the two sides had reached an agreement on the implementation of Palestinian reconciliation regarding the political program of the next phase, the future of the Authority, the PLO and the Palestinian State, community reconciliation, and the holding of elections on schedule.⁸⁰ During the meeting, it was agreed that the PLO Interim Leadership Framework should convene, the body charged with the reactivation and development of the organization’s structures. ‘Izzat al-Rishq, a member of the Hamas political bureau, said that the meeting was positive, open and transparent.⁸¹

Despite new hopes of bringing about a breakthrough in the reconciliation file, the days following the Mish‘al-‘Abbas meeting did not bear anything new, which made the former warn of foreign interventions intended to derail reconciliation efforts.⁸² On 18/12/2011, Fatah and Hamas delegations met in Cairo under Egyptian auspices, and announced practical steps to resolve the outstanding issues between them.⁸³ This helped spread an atmosphere of optimism, and prompted Mahmud Zahhar, who participated in the dialogues, to say that there was a breakthrough in many of the reconciliation issues.⁸⁴ Then on 20/12/2011, the Palestinian factions met in Cairo and agreed on the formation of the Central Election Commission, the Committee of Freedoms and Confidence-Building in the WB and GS, and the Committee of Societal Reconciliation, along with the names of their members, provided that the cabinet formation file be completed by the end of January 2012. They also agreed that the blocs and lists should hold a consultative meeting in Cairo, then another in the WB and GS, following which they would make recommendations to the PA president, who would then issue a presidential decree calling for the PLC to convene at the beginning of February

⁷⁹ WAFA, 24/11/2011,

⁸⁰ Ashraq Alawsat, 25/11/2011.

⁸¹ Ashraq Alawsat, 25/11/2011.

⁸² Interview with Khalid Mish‘al, site of Sudaneseonline.com, 22/11/2011.

⁸³ Al-Quds al-Arabi, 19/12/2011.

⁸⁴ Al-Quds al-Arabi, 20/12/2011.



2012.⁸⁵ Following these arrangements, Mish‘al said, “No one now can monopolize the political decision or management of the PA and PLO institutions.”⁸⁶

This meeting was considered an important step towards Hamas joining the PLO, through the participation of Mish‘al in the Interim Leadership, and the participation of all factions and independents in it. As this framework included members of the Executive Committee of the PLO, the secretaries-general of the Palestinian factions and PNC Speaker, in addition to four independent figures. And for the first time, the PIJ Secretary General Ramadan Shallah participated in such a meeting. It was decided that this framework should continue with its functions until the PNC elections were held and until a new PLO Executive Committee was elected in May 2012. It was agreed to hold elections for the president and the PLC in May 2012, in conjunction with the PNC elections. As for those outside the Palestinian territories, PNC elections would be held “wherever possible,” and by consensus where they could not be held.

This position did not mean that Hamas had abandoned its political stances, and the head of International Relations in Hamas, Usama Hamdan, stressed that the expansion of the PLO leadership framework was not a nominal process that led to new members joining the PLO, but a strategic matter related to the nature of the PLO and its political agenda in order to be consistent with the goals of liberation and return. Hamdan denied that the talk of rebuilding the PLO and of Hamas joining its leadership framework meant the birth of a “tame” Hamas primarily motivated to become part of the political process. He said:

Regarding Hamas political position, it is well-known and clear to all. Hamas, which had rejected the logic of surrender to the enemy under the heading of [peace] settlement when this process had the consensus of the whole world, cannot slip into this path that has proved its failure after a track of 20 years. Whoever thinks that Hamas has changed its positions, and that it accepts the PLO political surrendering agenda, is either deluded or is deceiving himself.

Hamdan added that Hamas, within a national framework, was seeking to rebuild the PLO, reconsider its political agenda, and make a comprehensive political review based on “our fundamentals and uncompromising rights;

⁸⁵ Site of Felesteen Online, 21/12/2011.

⁸⁶ PIC, 24/12/2011.



foremost among them, the liberation of our land from the river to the sea and the right of return.” As for his opinion on the directions that the organization should take after the agreement, Hamdan said: “Talk about intentions takes a long time; however, I believe that whoever thinks we will continue with the failed political track that the PLO followed in the past era is most certainly deluded. For this track must be reviewed strategically and not nominally, and events on the ground will distinguish the truth from the lie.”⁸⁷

Things continued to stagnate until the start of February 2012, when Hamas and Fatah agreed on President ‘Abbas to become the head of the consensus government, as a way out of the crisis between them. However, this breakthrough in the government file did not mean closing it permanently in light of the stalled application of other reconciliation files.

And at the time of writing (late 2013) the reconciliation file is still open, without tangible progress. ‘Abbas did not form his government, even two years after accepting this position; meanwhile, the gap continues to exist between Fatah and Hamas.

In general, the stances and practices of Fatah and Hamas contained mistakes. Mish‘al has called on the two movements to have courage in self-criticism and to shoulder the responsibility for the mistakes they made. Mish‘al said, “We must be courageous in our self-criticism... we should admit that there were mutual errors made by Hamas and Fatah; and at the same time we must not lay the blame on one another.” He added that “we all shared in making mistakes; so each faction must bear a part of the responsibility. All must join forces to end the schism, for it is not a Palestinian commodity, it is a contingent state that was forced on us, and we must discard it and let go of it.” Mish‘al stressed that “the nation is more important than all the factions, and the partisan ego must be dwarfed ... for Palestine is greater than Hamas and Fatah and all the factions.” He further added:

We say in a clear voice “let bygones be bygones;” we must forget the past, and leave it behind us. Enemies come to terms; but we in Hamas and Fatah are brothers. It is true that each faction of us has a different view of how to deal with the nation’s public affairs, but we have many common areas where we can cooperate and work in partnership with Fatah and with

⁸⁷ Sama News Agency, 23/12/2011, <http://samanews.com/ar>



all the Palestinian factions. True, we will not be in total agreement, but we will work with each other on things we agree on.⁸⁸

There is no doubt that Mish‘al’s position signified giving precedence to national considerations in the way Hamas views Fatah, and to the importance of developing that relationship, despite the challenges and difficulties that continue to stand in the way.

Second: Hamas' Position vis-à-vis the Palestinian Left

There is a large ideological gap between Hamas, which adopts Islam and the Palestinian Left, which generally adopts Marxism–Leninism. However, the Palestinian leftist forces are gradational in their leftism, and in the extent of their commitment, whether partial or total, to socialism and communist theories, their view of religion and of the cultural, social and economic environment that regulates the life of the Palestinian and Arab individual. Furthermore, the enthusiasm of some of them for the communist Marxist-Leninist thought, even socialist economics, has subsided with time; especially after the collapse of the communist experiment in the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe. Some on the left even took a more positive attitude to religion, as in the case of the PFLP-General Command (GC). We will not deal with Hamas’s position vis-à-vis every leftist Palestinian faction separately, but we will focus on two of the most prominent factions affiliated with the PLO, namely the PFLP and the DFLP; both of which came from the School of Arab nationalists who embraced Marxism-Leninism years after their inception.

Perhaps the Islamic movement in general, felt great aversion towards the school of thought that considers “religion the opium of the people” and says that “there is no god and life is matter”, which is an impression that has generally stuck in the mind of Islamists when they think about leftists. Islamists have also felt great aversion towards those leftists who mock expressions of piety, make a link between backwardness in the region and religion, and consider dissenting from religion or from the dominance of clerics as a condition for progressiveness. What made this aversion grow is the fact that, historically, Palestinian communists associated with Jewish communists, and supported the decision to partition Palestine in 1947 and establish the Israeli entity in 1948.

⁸⁸ *Asharq Alawsat*, 22/12/2011.



That is why mutual suspicion, challenging loyalties and affiliation, even accusations of treason, were the language used by people on both sides. What made this situation worse were the miserable conditions under which Muslims and Islamic movements lived under communist and socialist regimes, which adopted dictatorial and repressive methods in dealing with their peoples and opposed religious manifestations. This was the case in the Soviet Muslim republics, China, Albania, Yugoslavia, South Yemen, and Afghanistan....

In such an atmosphere, Hamas appeared. In the beginning, those belonging to it felt, in general, that they were closer to Fatah and its “conservative right-wing” nature; and which was originally reared in the laps of the Muslim Brothers (MB) Movement. However, they later did not recognize in the left a real popular rival or an imminent danger. They found that the influential leadership in Fatah had become proponent of serious political concessions, and was leading the Palestinian national project into the unknown. In contrast, they found that the leftist forces in general intersect with them on many political stances, especially in their stand against the Oslo Accords.

1. Elements Affecting Hamas's Relationship with the Palestinian Left

The most prominent elements affecting Hamas's relationship with the Palestinian left are summarized in the following points:

- a. Ideological background: the Marxist socialist background of leftist forces places them under the classification of the secular school, which is a school that provides a joint cover to Marxist parties and Fatah with its secular nature (although there are left and right classifications within this school). This classification means that the common ideological meeting points between the Islamists and the leftists are fewer in number; especially when it comes to social policy, economics, educational policy and views on the role of government.
- b. The Palestinian left, specifically the PFLP and DFLP, is part of the PLO structure, and one of its essential components alongside the Fatah movement. While until now, Hamas (and PIJ) have not joined the PLO.
- c. The Palestinian left has adopted the phased program for the liberation of Palestine, including the plan to set up a Palestinian state in the WB and GS; and its consequence, the recognition of Israel on the land occupied in 1948. In that, the Palestinian left differs from Hamas and agrees with Fatah,



recognizing international legitimacy and joining the peace settlement plan, but under conditions different to those approved by Fatah.

- d. In its funding, the Palestinian left depends mainly on the PLO; especially after the depletion of other sources of income from some Arab regimes and the Soviet system. This funding is controlled by Fatah, which leftist forces must take into consideration.
- e. The two fronts, the PFLP and DFLP, reject the Oslo Accords, deeming them unable to fulfil to the aspirations of the Palestinian people who want to establish their independent state on the land occupied in 1967. They are critical of the PA and its political, security, economic, and social performance. They also refuse to oppose the resistance, and they assert its right to go on until the Palestinian people's objectives are achieved. These matters constitute common meeting grounds between the two fronts and Hamas.
- f. The PFLP and DFLP have had good relations with the Refusal Front, especially Syria. This fact provided a positive atmosphere for cooperation with Hamas, especially in the period before the Arab revolutions, before 2011.
- g. The Palestinian left suffered from weakness, deterioration and divisions, so it turned into a marginal force in the Palestinian arena. Thus, at the time when Fatah and Hamas combined commanded 86% of the Palestinian people's votes in the WB and GS in the 2006 elections, and 90% of PLC seats, the leftist forces combined got no more than 7% of the votes, and 4% of the seats. Moreover, student unions' election results, and wherever elections were free, mirrored these results.

This meant that leftist forces became obsessed with the fear of marginalization and dissolution; so they sought to find an influential position in the Palestinian political equation that exceeded their limited weight. That is why we find them regularly criticizing the "policy of dividing shares" between Fatah and Hamas; they also criticize the negotiations that are limited to these two. At the same time, leftist forces called for adopting the system of full proportional representation, and not the system of lists as the proportional system probably prevents either Fatah or Hamas from gaining a majority (half + 1), and provides small parties with the chance to play a key role as a preponderant factor between the parties, after they realize the greatest part of their conditions in the political game.



Based on the above, we can see that there are points of intersection between Hamas and the forces of the left. But what unites the left, in general, with Fatah is more than what unites them with Hamas. Moreover, the political situation, the atmosphere of resistance, and the uprisings, all play a role in expanding or narrowing points of intersection between these parties.

2. The Development of Relations and Attitudes Between Hamas and the Palestinian Left

When the blessed *Intifadah* broke out on 9/12/1987, which Hamas had a major role in igniting, Hamas began to organize its activities and public demonstrations independently. As for the PFLP and DFLP, they joined Fatah in the formation of the United Leadership of the *Intifadah*. When the 19th PNC held its session in November 1988, the left agreed, along with Fatah, on the decision to declare independence, which was an implicit recognition of the Partition Plan for Palestine, Resolution 181 of 29/11/1947. However, the PFLP refused to approve UN Security Council Resolution 242, which deals with the Palestinian people as refugees.

Leftist factions followed the peace process that the Fatah leadership was conducting in Madrid in 1991, only to then be shocked by the signing of the Oslo Accords on 13/9/1993. So they took a clear stand of opposition to the leadership of Fatah and the PLO, and most leftist factions banded together in The Alliance of Palestinian Factions, which also included Hamas and the PIJ. This provided the basis for joint action and wide opposition to the Oslo Accords. This alliance of ten factions had its origins in a meeting held on the sidelines of the Conference in Support of the *Intifadah* in Tehran in October 1991, shortly before the Madrid Conference. Then the alliance was formalized on 1/1/1994, when it announced itself a part of the Alliance of Palestinian Forces.⁸⁹

When Hamas issued its charter in August 1988, it did not refer specifically to the forces of the Palestinian left; it rather emphasized what Palestinian forces have in common in the area of national action. Thus Article 24 stressed that Hamas “does not allow slander or condemnation of individuals or movements”; while Article 25 confirmed that Hamas and other national movements had mutual respect for one another, that Hamas understands their circumstances, as long as they do not pledge their allegiance to East or West. Hamas also assured all

⁸⁹ See Ibrahim Ghusheh, *op. cit.*, pp. 162–164 and 180–181.



movements, whatever their directions, that they have its support and assistance. Consequently, this positive spirit provided the ground for common national action with all political outlooks; although Article 25 did not lack caution in considering the relations of some of them with major powers (in the east or in the west.) It stressed positively the independence of Palestinian decision-making and its freedom from subservience to major powers.

The PFLP and DFLP continued their opposition to the Oslo Accords; while other leftist forces, such as the communist Palestinian People's Party (PPP), and Palestine Democratic Union—FIDA, a breakaway faction arising from a split within DFLP, preferred to join (in general) Fatah and the PA in the peace process. The PFLP and DFLP were in agreement with Hamas on boycotting the PLC elections in January 1996, but at the same time, they continued to participate in the PLO leadership and its representative institutions, and in providing quorum to meetings. This allowed Fatah the chance to pass the decisions that it needed, even those related to the peace process itself, which Hamas did not approve.

It appears that the stability of the PA and its institutions, and the desire of many of the cadres of the PFLP and DFLP to return to the WB and GS, created a rift within the ten factions that had taken a stand against the return under the occupation and Oslo Accords.

Moreover, this alliance continued to witness disagreement in its perception of the PLO, and provisional action, placing this alliance in 1996 in a “debilitated state,” in the words of ‘Abdul Rahim Mallouh, a member of the PFLP Central Committee;⁹⁰ and living in a state of “crisis”, as expressed by George Habash, leader of the PFLP.⁹¹ Hamas has tried to activate and develop the Alliance by calling for the establishment of the “Independence Front.” However, the PFLP and DFLP refused to participate in it, on the basis that this initiative addresses regulatory and not political issues.⁹² Moreover, in December 1996, ‘Abdul Rahim Mallouh stated that “the factional aspect and the differences within the coalition, which has become incapacitated, led us to withdraw from it, along with the DFLP.”⁹³ In general, the coalition has kept thereafter a fragile cooperation,

⁹⁰ *Albilad* magazine, 6/11/1996.

⁹¹ *Addustour*, 24/11/1996.

⁹² *Addustour*, 3/11/1996.

⁹³ *Alquds* newspaper, 18/12/1996.



especially with regard to opposition to the Oslo Accords, without further developing itself.

During *al-Aqsa Intifadah* 2000–2005, there was consensus between Hamas, the PFLP and DFLP on the continuation of the *Intifadah*, the activation of the resistance, the rejection of the Road Map proposed by President George W. Bush, and the activation of the PLO. The popular cooperation and the cooperation in resistance during the *Intifadah* were among the factors that led to breaking down the barriers between Hamas and the other parties, and creating a better environment for convergence in national action. The prominent and effective role played by Hamas in armed resistance engendered stature and respect among the national work forces.

The PFLP has demanded that Hamas joins the PLO and develops “a new resistance strategy,” based on national principles and the reform of the PLO institutions to include all national and Islamic forces.

The Cairo Agreement of 17/3/2005 was the basis to rebuild and activate the PLO, in which Hamas would participate. This was in addition to the participation of all national forces in the municipal and legislative elections. However, the election results came as a shock to leftist forces; as the PFLP got only three seats, while the alliance of the DFLP, FIDA and the PPP got only two seats, against 74 seats for Hamas. The PFLP and DFLP found in the victory of Hamas and the election results a chance to stop the wheels of the Oslo Accords, end the dominance of Fatah, and activate the PLO. However, they were afraid of Hamas’ Islamic agenda and its ability to “control” the national situation.

The PFLP stated that the people want change, and that they have chosen the option of resistance.⁹⁴ But it noted an evident contradiction in vision between the presidency and the PLC; so it called for a comprehensive national dialogue to come to an agreement on a transitional political vision and a timetable for the development of the PLO. It stated that the agreements that the PA had signed were not fate, and that there was a new reality that required a new political vision, which took the people out of the Oslo Accords and the Road Map. At the same time, the PFLP criticized the conduct of Hamas regarding “the acquisition” of the presidium of the PLC.⁹⁵ Jamil Majdalawi, a PFLP political bureau

⁹⁴ *Alrai*, Amman, 27/1/2006.

⁹⁵ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 19/2/2006.



member, asked Hamas to uphold the resolutions of “international legitimacy,” adding that the front considers Islam one of the sources of legislation and not the main source.⁹⁶

For its part, Hamas sought to form a government of national unity, and entered into negotiations with Fatah and leftist forces. The PFLP refused to join the government, under the pretext that Hamas did not explicitly include in the government’s program that it considers the PLO the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.⁹⁷ According to a statement by its central media, the DFLP considered the 2006 Hamas government a consecration of governments of “one color.”⁹⁸ The DFLP Secretary General Nayif Hawatmeh considered Hamas to be acting the same way Fatah used to in the seventies, and that Hamas’s strategic errors lay in that it “has yet to announce its commitment to the international legitimacy resolutions, so to avoid Israel’s accusations.” Hawatmeh predicted that there would be greater siege of the Palestinian people as a result of Hamas’ program. He reiterated his call on Hamas to recognize the resolutions of international legitimacy in order “to create for itself a civilized political ground in all circles.”⁹⁹

As for Hamas, it was surprised that the PFLP refused to join the government, and it did not see anything in its program that justified nonparticipation. According to the Hamas leader Salah Bardawil, “the PLO is clearly listed in our program,”¹⁰⁰ while Sami Abu Zuhri said that “political differences are not a reason to give up participation.”¹⁰¹ Hamas stated that it respected the PFLP decision, and that its formation of the government did not mean exclusivity in making decisions, and that cooperation would continue in other areas.¹⁰² Despite its nonparticipation in the government, the PFLP decided to grant confidence to the government formed by Hamas;¹⁰³ while the DFLP decided to abstain.¹⁰⁴ This meant that a positive spirit was still present, and that the matter did not escalate into a quarrel and attempts to topple and defeat the Hamas government. On the

⁹⁶ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 18/2/2006.

⁹⁷ *Al-Ayyam*, 20/3/2006.

⁹⁸ *Al-Ayyam*, 20/3/2006.

⁹⁹ *Sada Elbalad* newspaper, Beirut, 30/3/2006.

¹⁰⁰ *Al-Ayyam*, 20/3/2006.

¹⁰¹ *Al-Ayyam*, 20/3/2006.

¹⁰² *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 20/3/2006.

¹⁰³ *Al-Ayyam*, 23/3/2006.

¹⁰⁴ WAFA, 26/3/2006.



other hand, some have interpreted the left's unwillingness to participate as its refusal to ride in a boat that was virtually sinking, whether because of the Israeli and international blockades or the internal disruption caused by the Fatah leadership and its cadres, which were scattered across the PA's institutions and apparatus.

When Fatah and Hamas concluded the Mecca Agreement on 8/2/2007, the PFLP welcomed the stop in fighting and bloodshed, but it considered that this agreement came to consecrate duality and polarization, and that Hamas and Fatah had agreed on everything, keeping only three ministries for the other Palestinian factions.¹⁰⁵ The PFLP also rejected the stipulation to "respect" the PLO agreements with Israel, and saw in that a deterioration in the national program found in the National Reconciliation Document, signed in June 2006. That is why the PFLP has refused to participate in the government of national reconciliation.¹⁰⁶ However, Bardawil saw in the position of the left-wing blocs a kind of overbidding, and described this position as non-democratic. He also rejected their claim that the Mecca Agreement was different from what the National Reconciliation Document stipulated.¹⁰⁷

As for the DFLP, it saw in the Mecca Agreement an incomplete agreement that should be developed through comprehensive dialogue that included everyone.¹⁰⁸ But in spite of its accusation of dividing shares between Fatah and Hamas, the DFLP participated in the national unity government, formed in March 2007, with one minister in the Ministry of Social Affairs; he was Saleh Zaidan, a member of the DFLP Political Bureau.

When Hamas took over the GS in what is known as the military takeover of 14/6/2007, the forces of the Palestinian left saw the matter as a coup against legitimacy. While the PPP and FIDA have stood clearly with President 'Abbas and Fatah, the two fronts, the PFLP (and to a lesser extent the DFLP) considered that both Hamas and Fatah bore responsibility; however, they placed greater responsibility on Hamas.

The PFLP demanded that Hamas withdraws its control of GS, but it saw in what the Palestinian presidency has done in forming an emergency government a

¹⁰⁵ *Alquds*, 12/2/2007.

¹⁰⁶ See *al-Ayyam*, 21 and 27/2/2007.

¹⁰⁷ *Asharq Alawsat*, 22/2/2007.

¹⁰⁸ *Addustour*, 22/2/2007.



hasty step that aggravated the internal Palestinian situation. ‘Abdul Rahim Mallouh considered what Hamas had done had hurt the Palestinian issue, disrupted it, and caused it to regress. He added that the method it employed to take control gained her the enmity of “no particular current in Fatah, but the political enmity of all Palestinian parties.”¹⁰⁹ For his part, Jamil Majdalawi said that the primary responsibility for what took place in GS lies with Hamas.¹¹⁰

As for the DFLP, it also demanded that the situation in GS be returned to what it was before the Hamas “coup.” Hawatmeh called on Fatah and Hamas to retreat from “their divisive destructive policies,” and said the “Somalization” of GS by military force has turned the Palestinian issue back 60 years. Hawatmeh stressed the DFLP repeated calls to build a new Palestinian democratic political system based on full proportional representation.¹¹¹ A member of the DFLP Political Bureau, Qais Abdul Karim, stressed what Mallouh had mentioned, that Hamas “after the coup against legitimacy... has put itself in the face of all PLO factions and all the Palestinian people.”¹¹² The DFLP provided a four-point initiative as a solution for the predicament, summarized as follows: Hamas retreats from “its coup” and works on maintaining freedom and political pluralism; a transitional government headed by an independent personality to replace the emergency government formed by Abu Mazen, which prepares for new elections; adopting the proportional representation system; and activating the PLO and its institutions.¹¹³

Although most of the Palestinian forces and factions tried to play the role of mediator between Fatah and Hamas, and made great efforts to defuse the tension between them, the forces of the left that are affiliated with the PLO (PFLP, DFLP, PPP and FIDA) participated in the meetings of the PCC. The Palestinian presidency used this as a tool for taking over legitimacy, and to provide cover for a range of procedures and decrees that it had taken to confront Hamas, and also to entrench its authority. And while it used to criticize the practices of Hamas in the GS, its criticism of PA practices in Ramallah against Hamas, its cadres and institutions was “lackluster.”¹¹⁴ The PPP and FIDA parties supported the Fayyad

¹⁰⁹ *Al-Hayat*, 2/9/2007.

¹¹⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 9/12/2007.

¹¹¹ See *al-Ayyam*, 22/6/2007; and *Alghad*, 6/8/2007.

¹¹² *Al-Sharq* newspaper, Doha, 16/9/2007.

¹¹³ Arabs 48, 4/7/2007.

¹¹⁴ See Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007*, p. 65.

government; then the DFLP joined the government he formed on 20/5/2009. All of this was a source of discomfort for Hamas.

An atmosphere of tension prevailed in GS following statements by Mallouh, who resides in the WB, to the effect that the leaders of the PFLP are being subjected to “obscene and systematic” attacks in GS; and that the PFLP radio station was raided, and all its contents were confiscated. Hamas spokesman, Sami Abu Zuhri accused the PFLP of bias in favor of Fatah... he said that the criticisms of Mallouh were unfounded. He denounced the PFLP for failing to protest against what the security forces in the WB are doing against Hamas and its activists; he added that the PFLP radio station had been looted before the events of 14/6/2007, i.e., before Hamas took over control of GS.¹¹⁵

Hamas and both the PFLP and DFLP shared many points of consensus and convergence in the 2007–2013 period; although, in general, the PFLP was more understanding of Hamas than the DFLP. Hamas and the two fronts were on agreement in their criticism of the Annapolis conference in late 2007, and in criticizing the bargaining behavior of the PLO and the PA leadership. Furthermore, the two fronts stood by Hamas in its resistance in GS against the Israeli aggression, while Hamas allowed them a reasonable margin of political action and let them keep their military structures. It even tried to enlarge its government and let the two fronts join in; but it failed because of the relationship between the two fronts on the one hand and the PLO and the PA in Ramallah on the other; and because of their desire to tackle the division within a Palestinian comprehensive national framework.

The PFLP suspended its participation in the meetings of the PLO Executive Committee, because of what it called the decision of “the powerful leadership of the PLO” to return to direct negotiations under American-Israeli conditions. Hamas described the PFLP decision as “wise,” and called on the rest of the factions, members of the PLO, to do the same until the intended and “absurd situation” instituted by the Palestinian president was stopped.¹¹⁶ The front also condemned the PA agencies because they arrested a number of PFLP and Hamas activists in the WB, calling for a halt of security coordination with the Israeli occupation, which aims to eliminate the resistance.

¹¹⁵ *Asharq Alawsat*, 16/9/2007.

¹¹⁶ *Alghad*, 28/9/2010.



As for Hamas, the PFLP and DFLP have criticized some of its political positions, and a number of its measures in GS. The PFLP, for example, criticized the summoning of a member of its political bureau, Rabah Muhanna, by security authorities in GS, in March 2008.¹¹⁷ When Hamas agreed to a six month period of calm, in June 2008, the PFLP accused it of “courting the occupation,” because it agreed on a deal “less than that it had with the factions.”¹¹⁸ In August, Jamil Majdalawi directed sharp criticisms at Hamas that it was seeking to “impose its religious vision on GS by force;”¹¹⁹ an accusation that Hamas denied. In December 2009, the PFLP accused Hamas of preventing it from celebrating a festival on the occasion of its launch in Brigade Square, west of Gaza City.¹²⁰ Then in April 2010, the two fronts, the PFLP and DFLP, accused Hamas of imposing taxes in order to improve the income of the dismissed government, thus adding to citizens’ burden, and they called for organizing peaceful protests against these taxes.¹²¹

The DFLP Secretary General Hawatmeh accused Hamas of being “mired in the peaceful solution,” referring to the “Ahmad Yousef document.”¹²² More than once, the front accused Hamas of disrupting Palestinian reconciliation.¹²³

Hamas saw in a number of these accusations exaggeration and distortion. Observers noted that the behavior of the PFLP leaders abroad was friendlier than the behavior of their leaders at home, especially in the WB. It is not surprising that the leaders of Hamas resent being accused of “courting the occupation” or “being mired” in the peaceful solution; for if this was the case, the Hamas government would not be subject to defeat, to overthrow or to suffocating siege. It would have long ago resolved its differences with Fatah, agreed with it on the management of the PLO, the PA, and the negotiation path; and the schism would have lost its most fundamental *raison d'être*. That is why Hamas sometimes resorted to clarification and other times to directing harsh responses and criticisms at the forces of the left. For example, Hamas responded to the “imposing taxes” accusations by stating that it only activated the tax system that

¹¹⁷ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 25/3/2008.

¹¹⁸ *Asharq Alawsat*, 19/6/2008.

¹¹⁹ *Okaz*, 8/8/2009.

¹²⁰ *Al-Arab* newspaper, Doha, 8/12/2009.

¹²¹ *Asharq Alawsat*, 28/4/2010; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 30/4/2010.

¹²² See Aljazeera.net, 26/12/2006; and *al-Khaleej*, 21/2/2007.

¹²³ See *al-Hayat*, 5/9/2008 and 10/2/2013.



was in effect over the past years. A Hamas spokesman, Fawzi Barhoum, criticized the PFLP, saying that it keeps silent about the arrest of its cadres in the WB, preventing it from organizing festivals, and depriving it of the right of resistance; while it enjoys full freedom in GS, and carries out all its activities and events.¹²⁴

Mahmud Zahhar said in May 2010 that leftist forces serve the Fatah movement, whether consciously or unconsciously; and added that these factions have become an instrument of Fatah and its policy.¹²⁵ In late February 2012, Zahhar replied to charges by the left that Hamas was the reason for the perpetuation of the division, by saying that the left was linked historically, politically and physically to Fatah.¹²⁶ Salah al-Bardawil responded to accusations by Rabah Muhamna that Hamas disrupts the reconciliation because it is occupied with its interior elections, and its turning toward the Israeli side to achieve a twenty-year truce, as “pure lie and fabrication, and it is the maturity of the salary paid to the PFLP by Fatah.”¹²⁷ A leader of Hamas, Isma‘il al-Ashqar, denied allegations by the PFLP and leftist forces that Hamas had held meetings with Israeli officials in a European country to agree on a long-term truce. Al-Ashqar accused the PFLP and the Palestinian left of being in a state of “political intoxication,” saying that the party who sits with Israel and recognizes it is the PLO, which the PFLP is considered one of its factions; pointing out that the political money obtained by the Palestinian left from the PLO pushes them to launch campaigns of calumny and distortion against Hamas.¹²⁸

It is worth noting the lack of comments and responses by Hamas to the Palestinian left. These mostly come in the context of reaction and clarification; unlike the many and varied statements relating to Fatah, the PLO leadership and the PA. Perhaps Hamas’s desire to search for common points with the left in the face of the Oslo Accords on the one hand, and the relative weak popular and political weight of leftist forces on the other, are the reason for the scarcity of these statements. It was clear that the criticisms of Hamas by the left focused on political aspects; and Hamas did not involve itself with criticisms based on ideology or religion.

¹²⁴ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 30/4/2010.

¹²⁵ Felesteen Online, 8/5/2010.

¹²⁶ Felesteen Online, 29/2/2012.

¹²⁷ Quds Press, 1/11/2012.

¹²⁸ Site of *Mufakkirat al-Islam* (ISLAMMEMO.CC), 1/12/2012, <http://islammemo.cc/>



Conclusion

Some of the differences between Hamas and the PLO are basically due to the overlapping of authorities between the PLO, the PA and Fatah, leading to an imbalance in the Palestinian political system. This imbalance was not apparent before, when Fatah was in control of the PLO and the PA. But after the victory of Hamas in the elections and its formation of the Palestinian government, the Palestinian leadership became divided into two leaderships that differed in their political approach and stances, the Hamas leadership and the PLO leadership, each driving the leadership vehicle in a direction different from that of the other. Thus, in order to mend the relationship between the two, there must be:

1. Emphasis on the fundamentals of the Palestinian issue and a rebuilding of national tasks required from the PLO, taking into consideration the new reality in the structure of the Palestinian political system, in light of the growth of Hamas, and the demise of some organizations that no longer have real presence in the Palestinian street. There should also be emphasis on the fact that the PLO represents all Palestinians, at home and abroad; while Hamas, which won the legislative elections, and has considerable support in the Palestinian street at home and in the Diaspora, should be represented in the PNC and the Executive Committee of the PLO, according to its true strength in the Palestinian arena.
2. Agreement on a joint program between all existing Palestinian factions, which are still struggling and working for Palestine. It is natural for these to adhere to the Palestinian fundamentals without compromising the right of the Palestinian people to resistance to end the occupation and establish an independent sovereign Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, while guaranteeing the right of refugees to return to their homes from which they were expelled in 1948.
3. Ensuring a free, fair and equitable representation of the Palestinian people, their factions, and their patriotic competent individuals, in the membership of the PNC, proportionately shared inside and outside Palestine.
4. Emphasis on the Palestinian fundamentals, on the basis of which the PLO was instituted; return of the articles that had been canceled from the Palestinian National Charter under exceptional circumstances in 1996 and 1998. And that any change in the Charter should take into account the aspirations of the Palestinian people and their forces that are active on the ground.



5. To remove the overlapping between the PLO and its institutions and the PA; on the grounds that the PLO represents the Palestinian people at home and in the Diaspora, while the PA represents the Palestinians in the WB and GS.

In conclusion, everyone is a target at this stage of the Palestinian issue. It is feared that Israel and the United States take advantage of Palestinian differences to realize their interests. Fatah and Hamas may be right and may err, peaceful transfer of power is normal in politics, and it does not hurt Fatah to leave the leadership of Palestinian action to Hamas, in order to assess its long experience in power. More important is to continue to maintain the fundamentals of the Palestinian issue and the rights of the Palestinian people in their homeland, taking into account what is happening in the Arab countries with popular unrest and changes and their impact on the Palestinian issue. The struggle with Israel is a long one, and will not end with the change in the Palestinian leadership between one organization and the other. On the contrary, this change might activate the Palestinian struggle in every period of time, and introduce new elements that have a political vision that would serve the interests of the people and the liberation of Palestine.

دراسة علمية

**موقف حماس من منظمة
التحرير الفلسطينية
وفصائلها**

د. محسن محمد صالح

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