

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006



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Chapter One

*The Internal Palestinian Scene:
The Inevitability of Change and the
Blockade*

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The Internal Palestinian Scene: The Inevitability of Change and the Blockade

Introduction

The year 2006 opened with a dramatic development in Palestine, namely the spectacular victory of Hamas (The Islamic Resistance Movement) in the parliamentary elections. It won the majority of the seats of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), which gave the resistance an additional legitimacy, the legitimacy of the ballot box. By the end of the year, the relationship between the institutions of the presidency and the premiership as well as that between Hamas and certain wings in Fatah (The Palestinian National Liberation Movement) reached to the edge of total explosion. As always, the domestic Palestinian affairs were closely connected with the dynamics in the Arab world, the region and the world at large. This was the year of the monumental American failure in Iraq, the American-Israeli continuous disregard to the peace process and the complete failure of Israel in Lebanon and the acceleration of the crisis in Lebanon. The year had also witnessed an increasing western pressure on Syria, and American threats to Iran because of its nuclear program. Meanwhile, the Russian economy continued to prosper, and the Russian diplomacy regained confidence.

Since late 1960s, Fatah had led the Palestinian national movement, constituted the pillar of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and dominated the Palestinian political scene. Though facing some political challenges from within Palestine and unable to deter Arab regimes from meddling in the Palestinian affairs, the leadership of Fatah continued to be in the limelight for over 30 years. But the mid 1970s seems to have been decisive on the issue of Fatah leadership of the national movement. However, admittedly, the opponents of 'Arafat and Fatah did not have an alternative project to the one of an independent Palestinian state that 'Arafat had initiated and insisted on with the blessing of Egypt and the Soviet Union, notwithstanding the formidable Arab and Palestinian opposition. No doubt, this project had negative repercussions on the totality of the Palestinian issue, but it had obviously favorably responded to the wishes of some Arab regimes to gradually disassociate themselves from any responsibility towards the Palestinian issue.

In the name of the PLO, Fatah concluded in 1993 the Oslo Agreement that was based on the successes of the Palestinian *Intifadah*, the accelerating changes in the post-cold war world, and an increasing desire within Fatah leadership to achieve whatever can be achieved of the national agenda, irrespective of the broad Arab demands. Immediately after the signature of this agreement, an opinion emerged that both Fatah and the Israeli leadership had rushed to conclude it to be a preemptive step to check the rising political Islam in the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS). The rise of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (*Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filastin*), in the first *Intifadah* (1987-1993), may have obsessed both parties, but the Palestinian national leadership, as well as the leadership of the Hebrew state, had obviously believed that the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) would suffice to contain the Islamic phenomenon. But the developments that took place between the establishment of the PA and the outbreak of the second *Intifadah* had given the Islamic trend additional grounds to flourish and prosper.

Rather than catering for the Palestinian concerns and ambitions, the new authority had, in effect, become a huge security apparatus, and its institutions as well as ministries rapidly became breeding ground for wide spread corruption. The structural shortcomings of Oslo were gradually revealed, which slowed down the peace process that was not, anyhow, anticipated to reach to its expected end even in the eyes of those who negotiated and signed the agreement. The outbreak of the second *Intifadah*, by the end of September 2000, was presumably an indicator of the correct position taken by those who opposed Oslo, of whom the Islamic trend was the most prominent. During the years of the second *Intifadah*, the Islamic trend gained momentum and Hamas emerged as a leading Palestinian force, a development that the late President 'Arafat understood and took on board. 'Arafat himself had changed after the abortive Camp David 2 negotiations, and the emergence of an alternative strategy to negotiations that was patronized by the *Intifadah* and the resistance.

The dynamics of the internal Palestinian politics during the year 2005 had expressed themselves in the outcome of the municipal elections (See: *The Palestinian Strategic Report, 2005*), but by their very nature these elections could not provide a decisive indicator. Hence, it was necessary to await the legislative elections, as fixed by Oslo Agreement, and the restructuring of the PLO. However,

by the victory of Hamas in these elections, the domestic political setting in Palestine entered a transitional stage; as Fatah was still an effective force in the PA apparatus, resistance and at the popular level. Besides, the Palestinian affairs were by their very nature exposed to regional and international interference.

First: From the Elections to the Government

The Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas (Abu Mazin) and his advisers were not in favor of holding the elections in its scheduled date, on 25 January. In view of the consistently rising political influence of Hamas, ‘Abbas was not confident enough of Fatah’s victory, and he had, in fact, hinted several weeks before the elections that they may be postponed. Another indication that ‘Abbas may have harbored plans to delay the elections was his insistence that they take place only if the population of Jerusalem (*al-Quds*) were allowed to choose their representatives, though some have argued that he intended by this move to exert pressure on Israel to allow them to do so, and to exhibit his strong commitment to the Palestinian rights.¹ However, to support its declared program of democratization in the Middle East, superficially at least, the American administration seemed to have been keen to allow the Palestinian elections to go ahead. Besides, some Palestinian research institutes (either pro-Fatah or financially supported by western countries) had forecasted in its polls the likelihood of the victory of Fatah.² Hence, under the pressure of America, the Hebrew state allowed the population of Jerusalem to vote, and the elections were held on time.

**Table 1/1: A Sample of an Opinion Poll on the Popularity of
Fatah and Hamas**

| Date | 16-18/11/2005 ³ | 24-25/12/2005 ⁴ | 5-6/1/2006 ⁵ | 20-21/1/2006 ⁶ |
|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Hamas (%) | 19.3 | 25 | 25.1 | 23.4 |
| Fatah (%) | 37.1 | 38.5 | 38.2 | 39 |

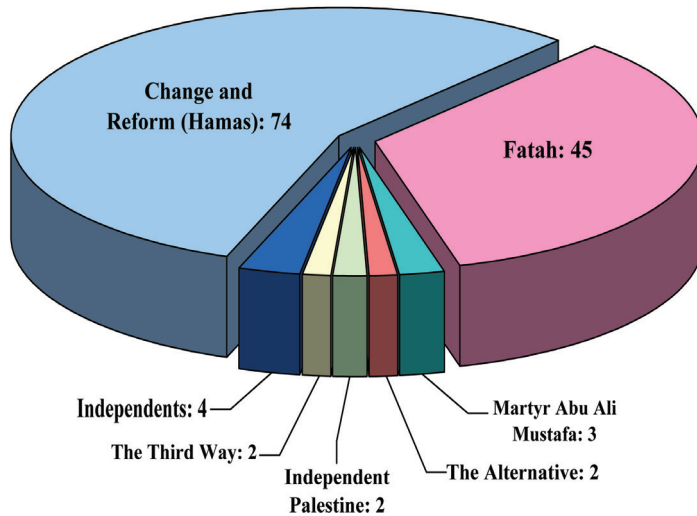
The Palestinian legislative elections were conducted on the basis of a joint system that accepted both individual constituencies and proportionate lists. Hamas won a comfortable majority, 74 seats, while its opponent, Fatah, got 45 only, and the rest of the seats were distributed as follows: four for Independents, three for

the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (*al-Jabha al-Sha‘biyah li Tahrir Filastin*) and two for each of the Alternative (*al-Badil*), Independent Palestine (*Filastin al-Mustaqillah*) and the Third Way’s (*al-Tariq al-Thalith*) lists.⁷ These results profoundly shocked the Palestinian leadership, many Arab countries, member-states of the European Union (EU) and the American administration. They also confirmed the overall rising influence of the Islamic trend in the Arabic and Islamic realms, along the last decade, and the end of Fatah’s monopoly of the national Palestinian affairs. But President ‘Abbas wisely declared that he will never hesitate to call upon Hamas to form the Palestinian government, and within a short period Hamas’ internal and diasporic leadership choose in meetings in Cairo Isma‘il Haniyah, the Movement’s most prominent and popular leader in GS, for the premiership. Hence, on 21 February President ‘Abbas officially authorized Haniyah to form the new Palestinian government.

Table 2/1: Results of the Palestinian Legislative Elections in the WB and GS 2006⁸

| Electoral list | No. of seats |
|---|--------------|
| Change and Reform (Hamas) | 74 |
| Fatah Movement | 45 |
| Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa (PFLP) | 3 |
| The Alternative (the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (<i>al-Jabha al-Dimuqratiyah li Tahrir Filastin</i>), People’s Party, Fida and Independents) | 2 |
| Independent Palestine | 2 |
| The Third Way | 2 |
| Independents (supported by Hamas) | 4 |
| Total | 132 |

Results of the Palestinian Legislative Elections in the WB and GS 2006



Hamas' first priority was a national unity government that includes Fatah and other Palestinian organizations and lists. But the American stubborn opposition to a Hamas led government, and Hamas' position towards the PLO indicated that the new government will be short lived. Besides, since the announcement of the results, Fatah leadership was inclined not to participate in a national government led by Hamas, and Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan had even openly declared that shame would be inflicted on Fatah if it participated in such a government.⁹ Salim al-Za'nun, a member of the Central Committee of Fatah and the chairman of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), declared that certain Arab and foreign quarters incited Fatah against Hamas.¹⁰ As for the Popular Front, two opinions emerged on the issue, the first, represented by the diasporic leadership, suggested participation, and the second, patronized by the internal leadership, opposed their Front's involvement in such a government. However, the Front had finally rejected participation because Hamas declined to recognize the absolute supremacy of the PLO, and refused to commit itself to its political program. Other small parliamentary groups hesitated, even conditioned their participation on the realization of some impossible demands. Hence, no option was left for Hamas except to finally form the government all alone, though the Palestinian public opinion strongly favored the option of national government.¹¹ However, in the light of the developments that took place in the Palestinian arena during the coming months of the year 2006, we may safely argue that the Palestinian parties that participated in the failure of the

option of a national government bear a heavy historical responsibility. For such a national consensus was utmostly needed in that difficult and sensitive transitional phase in which the national issue was confronted by major responsibilities and many challenges.

In his address before the PLC on 18 February, the Palestinian president called upon the forthcoming government to commit itself to the program and the treaties concluded by the PLO and the PA. It was obvious that the position towards the PLO and consequently the international treaties, including Oslo, would be a bone of contention and a source of increasing conflict between Hamas and Fatah. Haniyah, the elected premier, pinpointed, in his response before the PLC the position of his government by expressing his appreciation to the PLO, as the umbrella of the national Palestinian movement over decades, but he called for its restructuring in a way to be more effective and representative of all the Palestinian forces and trends. However, despite the criticism of the Fatah and the Executive Committee of the PLO, the government won the confidence of the PLC on 28 February.¹² Hence, a new stage in the course of the PA started, in which Hamas formed a government whose security organs and flabby bureaucratic apparatus were effectively under Fatah control.

Before we go any further, we should highlight two facts. First, the fairness of the elections and the neutrality of the election organs, thanks to President Mahmud ‘Abbas. Secondly, and most importantly, from a political point of view, the choice of Hamas by the Palestinian people in the WB and GS gave the resistance and its political plan of action an added impetus through the ballot box, which constituted a serious setback to the American-Israeli policy, even the European one, that dismissed the resistance as mere terrorism, and all the Palestinian resistance organizations, particularly Hamas, as nothing but “terrorist groups.”

Second: The Siege

The stubborn Israeli and western opposition to the new government was glaringly visible to everybody. However, to contain a probable boycott and economic pressure to his government and to satisfy the Palestinian public opinion that had been overburdened by the extravagance and corruption of the previous governments, Premier Isma‘il Haniyah undertook to pursue ascetic policies. But

he did not seem to have been aware of the great extent in which the Palestinian economy and finance were at the mercy of Israeli policies and western aid, and of the blockade that his government was bound to face. The siege started by Israeli decisions to suspend the delivery of the funds accumulated from the taxes and dues that were collected by the Hebrew state on behalf of the PA, and to impose restrictions on Palestinians working in Israel.¹³ Subsequently, an Israeli-American extensive effort started to impose an international blockade on the Palestinian government that stops all western aid, and hopefully lead to the downfall of Hamas government and the holding of new elections. Hence, the American administration (with the support of the Congress) and the countries of the EU suspended diplomatic contacts and stopped financial aid to the government under the guise of its rejection of what has become known as the conditions of the Quartet (i.e., the international committee, composed of the EU, the USA, Russia and the United Nations (UN), that was entrusted with the Palestinian question) that include recognition of Israel, discard of violence, surrender of the resistance's arms and commitment to the treaties concluded between the Palestinian and the Israeli sides.¹⁴

The first major challenge to the international blockade was represented by the Russian initiative of 9 February through which a Hamas delegation was invited to visit Moscow, a move that was supported by France alone, but resisted by the Israeli government, the American administration and the British government that doubted the ability of Moscow to influence Hamas. Nevertheless, Russia insisted, and a Hamas delegation, led by Khalid Mish'al, the head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, visited the Russian capital in the first week of March.¹⁵ However, in spite of the warm reception that the delegation received, and the Russian promises of help, the Russian initiative did not effectively break the blockade, and Russia stuck to its declared position and advised Hamas to accept the Quartet's conditions. But the political implications of the visit had greatly preceded its direct results, as, for many years, this was the first time in which Russia took a stand on the Palestinian issue that was basically different from that of Europe and America. It, moreover, indicated that Russia have begun to regain political will on Middle Eastern affairs, and the capacity to address the American strategic threat to its security in Eastern Europe.

The Arab attitude was not practically dissimilar from the Euro-American one. Admittedly, a number of Arab countries welcomed the government of Hamas, but the major Arab states that were directly connected with the Palestinian issue

could not dare to confront the American policy. Both the Egyptian premier and the Jordanian King demanded that Hamas commit itself to Oslo Agreement and its aftermath.¹⁶ Though Cairo had maintained security channels with the Palestinian government, the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs declined to receive his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmud al-Zahhar, during his Arab tour in April. Meanwhile, a noisy crisis erupted between the Jordanian government and Hamas over the former's arrest of a Hamas group that was allegedly planning to undertake military strikes against Jordanian targets.¹⁷ Hence, as expected, a scheduled visit of the Palestinian foreign minister to Amman was cancelled. The position of the Saudi government towards the Palestinian government was also reserved and cool. But Syria, who hosted the diasporic leadership of Hamas and that of other Palestinian organizations, warmly welcomed the outcome of the elections and Hamas assumption of power. It took the victory of the Palestinian resistance to be a success of its own policy, and a glaring indication that Syria is a major power in the region that cannot be overlooked or disregarded. Both Qatar and the Sudan received in their capitals big Hamas delegations, and promised to extent quick aid to the Palestinian government.¹⁸ (See chapter four of this book)

The pertinent problem that faced Hamas government was to avail funds to cover the salaries of the 140 thousand military and government officials. This was a formidable task as the government had been, even before Hamas assumption of power, practically bankrupt and indebted by a sum of about \$1.77 billion.¹⁹ During a visit that Khalid Mish'al paid to the Iranian Islamic Republic in February at the head of a big Hamas delegation, the Iranian Consultative Assembly issued a decree that ordered the formation of a committee to support Palestine, and the Iranian government offered an aid of \$250 million to cover the deficit of the Palestinian budget resulting from the suspension of European and American funds.²⁰ Meanwhile, an extensive popular campaign was initiated in the Arab world to collect contributions to Palestine. This widespread popular sympathy with the Palestinian government, coupled with the generous Iranian aid, embarrassed Arab regimes, and triggered an Arab summit in Khartoum that decided to extend urgent aid to the Palestinians.²¹ A number of Arab states, including Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Kuwait, paid their allocation to the special Palestinian fund ordered by the summit. But the Arab banks refused to transfer these funds to the Palestinian government lest they be exposed to American sanctions, which constituted a major predicament to the efforts to break to blockade.²² The cash

brought to the Palestinian treasury by Hamas ministers and officials via the passage between GS and Egypt was too modest to cover the huge deficit, particularly so as this effort was often interrupted by the European supervision of the gateway.

Being embarrassed by its illogical position towards a democratically elected government, and by the serious repercussions of the blockade on the Palestinian people, the European group seems to have been reluctant of the collapse of the PA, particularly so as Hamas government had exhibited surprising resilience to resist foreign pressure. Hence, a number of European states allocated a special fund under the supervision of the World Bank to extend aid to the Palestinians on condition that it does not pass via the Palestinian government, and be assigned to support the health and other major service sectors. The Quartet endorsed this European mechanism,²³ which participated in covering the cost of the basic Palestinian needs.

In any case, the Palestinian government managed to cover a reasonable percentage of the salaries' arrears, the acting minister of finance, Samir Abu 'Eisha, reported that out of the total sum of about \$1.18 billion, the government paid by the end of 2006 the sum of \$658 million, which covered 69% of the arrears of government officials in the educational sector, 74% of those in the health service and 60% of the military personal.²⁴

The intensity of the internal pressure resulting from the blockade was, however, reduced during the last months of the year either because of the significant payments given to the officials or due to the capacity of the Palestinians to adapt themselves to the new situation. But, the political tension persisted. Hamas accused the institution of the presidency and some of the ilks of President 'Abbas with collusion with the blockade. In a stormy meeting between the president and the prime minister, the former rejected the suggestion of Haniyah to use the funds of the Palestinian Investment Fund, which was under 'Abbas's authority, to reduce the damaging impact of the siege.²⁵ Besides, Sa'ib 'Urayqat, the presidents' appointee to coordinate the functions of the passages, connived with the European supervisors to obstruct the influx of money brought by some of Hamas leaders and ministers to GS.²⁶ By the end of the day, the blockade had significantly contributed in accelerating internal tension, and fueling the propaganda campaigns against Hamas. But the blockade imposed on the Palestinian government could not have alone generated this crisis as the Palestinian had previously managed to sail

through during the years of the first *Intifadah* without external aid, and could have done so this time. The siege was thus one of a number of interrelated factors that expressed an acute internal conflict around authority and on the whole orientation of the Palestinian national struggle.

Third: The Conflict of Authorities

The struggle around authority between the president and Hamas government had started even before the latter's official assumption of power. During the last session of the previous Fatah dominated PLC, held after the elections, several decisions and constitutional amendments were passed, which were designed to strengthen the presidency at the expense of the government and the newly-elected council. For, they gave the president absolute power to form the Constitutional Court and the Civil Service Bureau.²⁷ Besides, the previous PLC sanctioned the appointment of an outsider to be the secretary-general of the new council.²⁸ Since the occupant of this position should strictly be from among the elected members of the council, Hamas considered this move a "white coup" on the constitution.²⁹ Immediately after the first session of the new council, in which 'Aziz Dweik was elected to preside the council, a conflict erupted between him and President 'Abbas over the legitimacy of the decrees issued during the last session of the previous council. The issue was taken up to the Constitutional Court, but this was a bad omen for the relationship between the president and his new government.

The president issued a decree that placed all the public media institutions under his direct supervision. Similarly, another presidential decree formed a special corporation to administer the frontier passage under Sa'ib 'Urayqat, a former minister and Fatah member of the PLC (Rafah Passage was placed under the president's security organ). A third decree tightened the presidents's grip over all the security organs that were entrusted to some of his close aides. Rashid Abu Shbak (the ex-commander of the Preventive Security Apparatus) was appointed in charge of the internal, civil defense, preventive and police security organs, that were all previously under the authority of the government, while Sulayman Hillis became the director of the National Security Organ.³⁰ Incidentally, this was exactly what the late President 'Arafat did, and to which 'Abbas, then the premier, had strongly objected. President 'Abbas had also sidelined all the ministers, including

the minister of foreign affairs, from his foreign visits, contacts and negotiations with Arab and international envoys, irrespective of their attitude towards Hamas government.

However, this struggle between the president and his government reached its zenith when the minister of interior, Sa'id Siyam, formed a security force, named the Executive Force,³¹ under his direct authority, which was composed of personnel from al-Qassam Brigades (*Kata'ib al-Qassam*) of Hamas and other pro-resistance forces. Though the primary motive behind the formation of this force was the deteriorating security conditions in GS and the loss of the interior minister of his presumed authority over the PA security organs, President 'Abbas issued a decree that cancelled the minister's decision, and refused to incorporate the members of this force in the cadre of the Ministry of Interior. Furthermore, all other government appointees remained temporary and were not legally included in the civil service.

Meanwhile the Palestine News Agency (WAFA), reported a presidential communiqué of an agreement between President 'Abbas and Premier Haniyah on some legal and financial steps to be taken to incorporate this force in the security organs of the Ministry of Interior.³² The spokesman of the Ministry of Interior had, on the other hand, reported that the president had sanctioned a financial fund for the Executive Force, and ordered the finance minister to enact administrative and financial measures to employ the first batch of this force that was composed of 3,422 individuals.³³

However, a few days later, the president declared the formation of a new security force under the name of the Presidential Guard,³⁴ which indicated a tendency to accelerate the military tension between the security organs of the president and those of the government. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported a few weeks later a plan to increase this force and an Israeli decision to arm it,³⁵ while other reports claimed that this armament will be provided by Jordan and Egypt.³⁶ Coupled with these reports of a substantial increase in the numbers of the Presidential Guard and their armament, which had already intensified the internal crisis, Hamas government was not allowed throughout the year 2006 to assume control over government institutions, particularly the security forces and the Civil Service Bureau (i.e., the major body of the PA). Meanwhile, the Israeli forces inflicted painful strikes (particularly from the end of June to early August) on the government and the PLC, especially an extensive arrest campaign that detained

64 of Hamas ministers and members of the PLC in the WB, including the president of the PLC Dr. ‘Aziz Dweik.³⁷ This measure reflected the frustration, despair and impatience of the Hebrew state that could not tolerate a Hamas government for any and at any time.

Fourth: Security Tension

The internal Palestinian crisis was undoubtedly essentially political in nature. This was reflected in the Israeli-American rejection of the democratic transformation that the Palestinian arena had experienced, and in the insistence of the previous Palestinian leadership to click to power and control the decision process of the new Hamas government. Besides, is the difference in the political outlook of Hamas and Fatah with regard to the conditions of the Quartet, the political program and the handling of the conflict. Meanwhile, the international blockade imposed on the government and the Palestinian people had gone through the roof. But what had particularly frustrated the Palestinian people was the security hazards and chaos represented by the frequent bloody clashes between Hamas forces on one side and those that supported the president or some factions within Fatah. Since the establishment of the PA in the mid 1990s, all the Palestinian political forces were verbatimly committed to the policy of “sanctity of the Palestinian blood” particularly so during the 1996 assault of the authority on Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in which many of their leaders were arrested and tortured. Nonetheless, none of the two organizations had retaliated militarily, but they tolerated this inexcusable persecution until it vanished away. But the crisis of 2006 was in a way unique as it was around fundamental issues, namely governance and decision making.

The PA areas in GS and the WB witnessed a series of serious demonstrations in which both parties, the government and the opposition, tried to exhibit their muscles and popular support, and to establish their positions on the credibility of the outcome of the elections, i.e., a true reflection of the balance of power in the Palestinian street. But the most worrying developments were the participation of some units of the security forces in these riots, the slogans raised by some of the demonstrators to topple the government and the call of some professional sectors, particularly in the WB, for a general strike.³⁸ The prime pretext of these demonstrators and strikes was the payment of the salaries which the government failed to honor because of

the blockade and the boycott. Rather than forming a united front of all the national forces to break this impasse, the issue of the salaries has become a vehicle to oppose and topple the government. Behind this scenario of demonstrations and counter demonstrations, the aggravating conflict between the government and the president and a widespread press campaign against the government was apparently a discreet plan to provoke Fatah's organizational fanaticism and to indulge some of its military wings into a struggle against Hamas and the government. Gradually, this political incitement turned into military confrontation between Hamas and Fatah, the executive force and the preventive security, and even within the security organs themselves. On 31 March, 'Abd al-Karim al-Quqa, the secretary-general of the Popular Resistance Committees that was affiliated to Hamas, was assassinated. These committees claimed that they have sufficient evidence to incriminate the strong Fatah leader in GS, Muhammad Dahlan, and the Israelis in this crime.³⁹ Since the end of the first week of May, interrupted clashes erupted between some of Hamas and Fatah forces that culminated in the assassination of Muhammad al-Titir, a leader of Hamas' military wing al-Qassam Brigades, on 16 May at the hands of an armed group.⁴⁰ In the mid of a shocked popular feeling, the National Follow-up Committee (constitute of all Palestinian organizations), concluded that both parties are responsible.⁴¹

Yasir al-Ghallban, another member of al-Qassam, and Dr. Husain Abu 'Ajwa one of Hamas political leaders, were also assassinated on 4 June and 6 July respectively. Moreover, following the formation of the Executive Force, armed conflicts were renewed, this time between members of this government force, and members of the preventive security organ that were loyal to Muhammad Dahlan, of which the most serious was the early October clashes in which eight were killed and 100 wounded.⁴²

Meanwhile, efforts by two Palestinian movements, the Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front, and the Egyptian security delegation, stationed in GS,⁴³ succeeded in halting the clashes, and in forming a coordination committee to organize the relations between the two conflicting parties. But this was just a temporary arrangement, and the fighting was bound to resume because of the political stalemate that developed into an almost total rift between President 'Abbas and Premier Haniyah. By December, a state of almost total chaos prevailed. Assassination attempts against the minister of interior, Sa'id Siyam, and the

minister of the detainees, Wasfi Qabha, took place on 10/12/2006 and 13/12/2006 respectively. On the latter date, Bassam al-Farra, a leader of al-Qassam Brigades in Khan Yunis, was also assassinated. The Presidential Guard fired on 15/12/2006 at a Hamas rally in Ramallah in which 35 were wounded. Mahmud al-Zahhar, the minister of foreign affairs, was fired on 17/12/2006, the presidential residence in Gaza was bombarded, and some armed men forcibly entered the headquarters of the Ministries of Agriculture and Transport.⁴⁴

According to statistics prepared by the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), this chaotic situation led to the death of 322 Palestinians during the period 1/1-30/11/2006, of whom 236 were from GS and 86 from the WB, compared to 176 killed during 2005 (97 in GS and 79 in the WB). The same statistics reported 41 killed for political reasons (40 in GS and one in the WB), 88 because of family feuds, and 83 as a result of security chaos and misuse of weapons. The report also recorded aggression against 12 academicians, 16 against municipalities and their personnel, 12 against PA judges, 22 against journalists and 93 cases of individual and collective kidnapping in which Palestinian and foreign visitors were the victims.⁴⁵ Al Mezan Center for Human Rights gave the following table for security violations in GS during the period 2002-2006.⁴⁶

**Table 3/1: The Total Number of the Victims of Security Unrest in GS
2002-2006**

| Year | Cases | Injured | | Killed | | Kidnapped | |
|------|-------|---------|----------|--------|----------|------------|--------------|
| | | Total | Children | Total | Children | Foreigners | Palestinians |
| 2002 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2003 | 39 | 111 | 9 | 18 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 2004 | 121 | 178 | 6 | 57 | 6 | 6 | 10 |
| 2005 | 394 | 895 | 151 | 101 | 23 | 16 | 23 |
| 2006 | 869 | 1,239 | 170 | 260 | 27 | 19 | 104 |

The following table displays incidents of the state of security unrest and internal violence in GS during 2006.

**Table 4/1: Incidents of the State of Insecurity and Internal Violence
in GS 2006⁴⁷**

| Type of incident | No. of incidents |
|---|------------------|
| Family feud | 152 |
| Conflict between political factions | 59 |
| Conflict inside the PA apparatuses | 14 |
| Clashes between political factions and security apparatuses | 22 |
| Clashes between families and security apparatuses | 26 |
| Clashes between families and political factions | 16 |
| Firing in ceremonies | 14 |
| Firing in marches | 6 |
| Misuse of weapons | 82 |
| Assassination of traitors | 1 |
| Kidnapping | 97 |
| Killing | 66 |
| Assault against employees, public characters and foreigners | 74 |
| Closure of road | 42 |
| Assault against institution | 121 |
| Explosion | 57 |
| Other | 53 |

This rapid security deterioration and the suspension of dialogue between the camps of the president and the prime minister led to further chaos during late 2006 and early 2007. A civil war was on the gate which triggered Arab-Saudi intervention that called the two parties to the decisive reconciliation in a meeting in Mecca.

Fifth: The Resistance

The differences over the political program and the conflict over authority were not the only sources for internal dissension, as they were coupled by an old-new conflict around the right to resist the occupation and confront the frequent Israeli attacks. During the national dialogue convened in March 2005 in Cairo, the Palestinian resistance forces accepted President ‘Abbas plea to silence the guns (appropriately called “*al-tahdi’ah*” in Arabic) until the end of the year. But neither ‘Abbas nor the Egyptian side were able to secure a reciprocal step from Israel, and the Israeli forces continued the assassination operations during 2005 against the resistance activists, and the armed infiltrations in different districts in the WB in particular. Hence, early in 2006, the major resistance factions, al-Qassam Brigades, al-Quds Brigades (*Saraya al-Quds*) and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (*Kata’ib Shuhada’ al-Aqsa*), declared the end of the truce, and warned of a massive reprisal to each Israeli attack.⁴⁸ But, in the following few days, President ‘Abbas repeatedly called the resistance forces to continue *al-tahdi’ah*, while some of his ilks despised the launching of missiles from GS against Israeli targets, a means that has become a major vehicle of responding to the Israeli attacks.

During the first three months of the year, the Israeli forces assassinated six leaders of al-Quds Brigades of the Islamic Jihad in the WB and GS, while an Israeli spokesman vowed that the outcome of the elections and the assumption of Hamas to the governance will not change the Israeli policy of targeting Hamas leaders.

To avoid embarrassing the government and the president, al-Qassam Brigades did not participate in the resistance’s retaliatory operations, mainly launching of missiles, against the Israeli acts of aggression. The increasing Israeli assassination of the leaders of al-Quds Brigades impelled the organization to undertake a major “self-immolation”⁴⁹ operation, on 17 April, in which eight Israelis were killed and 65 wounded. While President ‘Abbas dismissed this operation as “vile,”⁵⁰ both Fatah and the government saw in the repeated Israeli attacks on the Palestinians the reason behind these operations. However, it was evident that the Israeli side was not concerned by the *tahdi’ah*, which it viewed as an exclusive Palestinian concern, not a means of regularizing their relations with the Palestinian resistance.

The summer months witnessed the total collapse of the truce, wherein al-Qassam Brigades, the Popular Resistance Committees and the Army of Islam (*Jaysh al-Islam*) undertook on 25 June the joint operation “Fading Illusion” (*al-Wahm al-Mutabaddid*) which had largely changed the rules of the game.

After this operation, the Israeli intensified their effort to topple Hamas government, but they were soon bogged in a 33 days war (12 July-14 August) against Lebanon and Hizbullah, that ended in their failure to defeat the forces of Hizbullah in Southern Lebanon, and cost their army dearly. In the midst of the war, President ‘Abbas declared that Israel offered a truce in GS in return for the stoppage of the missiles.⁵¹ He conveyed during the following weeks several meetings with representatives of the Palestinian organizations in GS in an attempt to strike a truce, or a new *tahdi’ah*. By the end of these meetings, President ‘Abbas declared the renewal of the *tahdi’ah*, but the Palestinian factions denied that an agreement was concluded on this issue.⁵² However, since his election for the presidency, ‘Abbas was keen to stop the fighting efforts of the resistance irrespective of the Israeli position, while the resistance factions insisted on a reciprocal truce in both the WB and GS, not the Strip alone. Thus, irrespective of whatever had been concluded between ‘Abbas and the factions, things remained substantially the same on the ground.

In November, the Israeli force invaded Northern GS under the pretext of silencing the missiles. On his part, President ‘Abbas dismissed the launching of these missiles as an irresponsible and futile act.⁵³ But the factions condemned the presidents’ attitude which they viewed as an attempt on his part to cover up the Israeli aggression. In any case, the events of the year 2006, both on the level of the Israeli invasions and attacks and the reactionary operation of the resistance, proved that the reasons behind the conflict in Palestine are intertwined, and that it is extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible, to separate them from each other. Thus, the best, in fact the only, way is to deal with them jointly and as one unit (for more details on the Israeli aggression, the Palestinian resistance and the issue of the detainees.

Sixth: Fatah and the PLO

Since the sessions of the national dialogue and the consensus that the Palestinian factions reached to in Cairo in March 2005, the reactivation and restructuring of the PLO has been one of the priorities of the Palestinian national drive. However, despite the efforts of the president of the PNC, Salim al-Za'nun, and his meetings with the leaders of the Palestinian factions in Damascus, President Mahmud 'Abbas, the president of the Executive Committee of the PLO, did not take a single decision to initiate the restructuring process.

No wonder, for since the establishment of the PA in 1994, its leadership had practically and implicitly strove to marginalize and neglect the PLO. This policy was presumably initiated and pursued by the leaders of the authority to prepare the Palestinian public opinion for a final settlement of the Palestinian issue that some circles in the PA leadership were almost ready to exclude the right of return for the Palestinian refugees. The PLO was a body that represented all the Palestinians, within the Palestinian territories or in the diaspora, and an umbrella for all the Palestinian factions (except Hamas and the Islamic Jihad), of which a number were in the diaspora and in opposition to the Oslo Accords. Hence, the marginalization of the PLO was in essence an attempt to get rid of the complex issue of the diaspora Palestinians, refugees as well as factions. But the victory of Hamas in the elections, and its consequential formation of the new government had cornered President 'Abbas to such an extent that he reverted once more to the legitimacy of the PLO. He emphasized that the conduct of the negotiations is under its prerogative, it signed Oslo and should be in charge of the negotiations process. Moreover, 'Abbas insisted that the PLO is the legal reference for PA and its government, irrespective of the political force that may lead this government. By this move, the president wanted, on one side, to sideline Hamas' government from the negotiations process, and, on the other side, to impose the political program of the PLO on the new government. But in reality, he, presumably unintentionally, strengthened the Palestinian call for the restructuring of the PLO and the reactivation of its institutions. This has become an urgent demand for many Palestinian factions and groups, not Hamas alone.⁵⁴

In late February, the president of the PNC, Salim al-Za'nun, declared that the Central Council of the PLO will meet in Cairo in May 2006, implying that this gathering would signal the beginning of the restructuring process. But Taysir

Qubba'ah, a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO, dismissed these declarations as reckless.⁵⁵ However, in the presence of Faruq al-Qaddumi, the secretary-general of Fatah Central Committee, the secretary-generals of the Palestinian organizations convened in late March a meeting in Damascus that agreed to form a top level committee to look into the restructuring of the PLO.⁵⁶ Subsequently, this committee had reportedly reached to a draft agreement that put in place a mechanism for the restructuring process. Moreover, other meetings were held during the coming months in Damascus, again with the presence of al-Qaddumi, which focused on the same issue.⁵⁷

But what was at stake was the capacity of al-Qaddumi to represent Fatah, and his ability to exercise significant political and moral pressure on 'Abbas and the Executive Committee of the PLO. For the differences between al-Qaddumi and 'Abbas, had accelerated since the latter's handing over the functions of the Political Bureau to Nasir al-Qudwah, the minister of foreign affairs, and the relationship between the two men continued to be tense on and off throughout the year 2006, which reflected one aspect of the crisis within Fatah ranks. Mahmud 'Abbas was, in fact, not the most popular personality among Fatah leaders, and the division of authority, after the demise of President 'Arafat, between him and al-Qaddumi, the former for the presidency of the PLO and the latter for the presidency of Fatah's Central Committee, was meant to deprive 'Abbas from monopolizing the Palestinian national affairs. But 'Abbas remained dominant, because his leadership of the PA enabled him to keep under his personal control the executive and financial powers. Moreover, after the establishment of the PA, Fatah's predominant influence remained in the WB and GS, not in the diaspora. Thus, al-Qaddumi, who was himself in the diaspora, remained in the wilderness with little or no authority over both Fatah and the already largely marginalized PLO. 'Abbas surrounded himself with personalities who shared his vision on the future of the peace process, and were known for their close relations with the USA. Some of these leaders did not originally belong to Fatah and others were from its second and third generations, a development that infuriated al-Qaddumi and most members of Fatah Central Committee. Expressing the frustration of a number of the traditional leaders, Hani al-Hassan, a member of Fatah Central Committee, warned against what he called "American attempts to control Fatah."⁵⁸

By the end of May, 'Abbas and al-Qaddumi met in Amman, and it was then rumored that a deal had been struck between the two leaders.⁵⁹ But this proved

to be wishful thinking, and soon tension and competition prevailed. Amidst the controversy over the national government, Fatah Central Committee failed to convene in October a scheduled meeting in Amman to discuss the issue because of the acute differences between ‘Abbas and al-Qaddumi. A month later, Fatah Revolutionary Council met in Ramallah to elect ‘Abbas for a newly created position, the general commander of the Palestinian forces, a development that provoked the mockery of al-Qaddumi.⁶⁰ By the end of the year, ‘Abbas issued two resolutions, namely the appointment of his close associate Yasir ‘Abd Rabbuh as secretary-general of the Executive Committee of the PLO, and the closure of the office of the Political Bureau of the PLO in Amman, which had practically stripped al-Qaddumi of all his executive powers except the insignificant supervision of the PLO headquarters in Tunis.⁶¹

These conflicts within Fatah were not confined to those between ‘Abbas and al-Qaddumi but had extended to almost all Fatah organizations in the cities of the WB and the GS. Hence, a consensus over the restructuring of the PLO had become much more problematic and difficult. However, though the Palestinian organizations had earlier reached to an agreement in Damascus on the means and mechanism for the restructuring of the PLO, the issue was not an exclusively Palestinian concern. For the PLO itself was established by an Arab resolution and continued to function under Arab patronage, and most of its institutions and populace are in the Arab world. Hence, the issue of the reconstruction of the PLO and the political balance of power within its ranks was also, perhaps to a greater extent, an Arab concern. But until the end of the year, there was no sign of an Arab green light to this reconstruction. However, the first nod to the process appeared in the so-called Egyptian plan for national Palestinian reconciliation, which included a clear text on the reconstruction of the PLO. Then come Mecca Agreement, which had effectively kicked off the process.

Seventh: The National Dialogue and the Formation of a National Unity Government

Since the marginalization of the PLO and the consequential reluctance of its leaders to include in its ranks other forces, there had been no official umbrella under which the various factions and independent public figures may meet to deliberate

on the Palestinian concerns. But the second *Intifadah* had triggered the birth of such a body, namely the National Follow-up Committee in GS that coordinated the relationships and efforts of the active political forces of the *Intifadah*, while Damascus remained the venue for the meetings of the leaders of the diasporic factions. The sessions of the national dialogue in Cairo in March 2005 constituted the most important drive in the quest for a Palestinian political umbrella where the drawbacks of the PLO could be discussed and overcome. In fact, following the aggravating political tension, most of the controversial issues were put in the negotiation table of the national dialogue.

What had further emphasized the notion of a national dialogue was a greatly controversial memorandum known as “the Prisoners Document.” Marwan al-Barghuthi, a detained Fatah leader, who plays varying roles in the organization, including its relationship with other Palestinian organizations, was the one who initiated in April the efforts to negotiate and finalize this document. Through the good offices of Muhammad Dahlan, the Israelis facilitated the transfer of a number of detained leaders, representing all Palestinian factions, to the Israeli Prison Hadarim where the dialogue around the document took place.⁶² Al-Barghuthi, who knew the impact of the prisoners in Israeli jails on the Palestinian public opinion, seemed to have assumed that his effort and that of his fellow detained leaders would ultimately lead to a national consensus that end the accelerating differences between the government and the president, as well as the controversy on and around a national government. He does not seem to have greatly cared for the abnormality of this move, where a group of detainees, who are themselves experiencing the hardship of prison and looking forward for freedom, would determine the political program of a people fighting one of the most complicated movements of national liberation.

The document, named “National Conciliation Document,” was published under the signature of detained leaders representing most of the Palestinian factions, including Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.⁶³ It found spontaneous welcome from President ‘Abbas and the Executive Committee of the PLO, but was coolly and reservedly received by Premier Isma‘il Haniyah, who protested that more time was needed to thoroughly study the text. The full support of the president and the courteous response of the prime minister were certainly due to the fact that the document endorsed the demands that both the Quartet and the president asked the

government to accept, i.e., recognition of the Jewish state and the acceptance of Oslo and subsequent treaties. But, from Hamas' perspective, the most problematic text was article 18 of the document, which stipulated that the national understanding and the national government should be based on the Palestinian national consensus program, Arab legitimacy and the decision of the international community that are fair to the Palestinian people, who are represented by the PLO, the PA, composed of both the presidency and the government, and the national and Islamic factions. The document, thus, disregarded the fact that Hamas and the Islamic Jihad were not represented in the PLO, and that they had consistently refused any concessions to Israel that are related to recognition, before the characteristics of a final settlement become visible, and clearly show what the Palestinian people will get in return.

President 'Abbas adhered to the Prisoners' Document, and threatened to call a referendum (plebiscite) on it. Meanwhile, the national dialogue was resumed in the town of Ramallah and Gaza, which was attended by representatives of the active Palestinian factions in the WB and GS as well as some distinguished independent personalities. The conferees were, however, placed in a difficult position. While realizing on the one hand the moral weight of the detainees, they, on the other hand, were rather surprised that a group of prisoners, who had no organizational functions, determines a working program for the national movement and all the national forces. The next objective had, thus, become a new text for national conciliation. President 'Abbas gave the conferees 10 days grace period to reach to an agreement, but, at the same time, implied that a referendum may be called, though such a step is not legally grounded in the Palestinian constitution.⁶⁴ However, 'Abbas seemed to have felt that the outcome of such a referendum will be in favor of his vision because of the popular emotional support to the detainees, the lengthy size and ambiguity of the document, whose most articles were, anyhow, generally accepted, and the tremendous economic hardship caused by the blockade. Conversely, the opponents of the document and the referendum argued that the latter is unconstitutional, and that no people could ever be asked to go to the polls on the viability of their national interests. In any case, they added, if a referendum is to be held let it be open to all the sons of Palestine, both in the interior and in the diaspora, because the issues at stake concern them all.

The president ignored the opponents, and on 26 July issued a decree that ordered a referendum on the document. However, the conference of national

dialogue excluded the option of the referendum, and continued its discussion for a new text.⁶⁵ Finally, the conference reached to an agreement on the document that was signed in a meeting between the president and the prime minister.⁶⁶ A number of the document's clauses were amended, but the most notable alteration was in the controversial article 18, which then read as follows:

To enact a Palestinian plan for comprehensive political action, which unifies the Palestinian political discourse on the basis of the Palestinian national interests, as mentioned in this document and the decision of the Arab and international legitimacies that are fair to our peoples, and maintain their rights and fundamentals, to be executed by the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority, that is the president, the government and the national and Islamic factions...

With this revised National Conciliation Document, the quest for a national government was resumed, which, in the eyes of every body, was the only exist from this impasse, and the best way to confront foreign pressure and the blockade. But, contrary to the expectations of some quarters and individuals, this document did not resolve the difficulties, and it was soon realized that the differences over the national government, be it on its program, names of ministers and distribution of ministries, was even more complicated than that over the text of the document. In fact, the issue of the national government was not an internal Palestinian concern merely related to a conflict between those who won the elections and a group of politicians who refused to surrender the privileges of authority and governance, but rather an area for American, European, Israeli and Arab pressure.

The tension and acute differences between the Palestinians had subsidized during the weeks of the Israeli war on Lebanon, and everybody was impatiently awaiting the outcome of this war, which had, however, revealed an Arab sharp division, wherein President 'Abbas supported the American camp. Once the war was over, the Palestinian differences reappeared, even more acutely, particularly as Hamas and the resistance forces viewed the victory of the Lebanese resistance as a success to them. During the last week of August and the early weeks of September, various ideas were voiced on the nature of the new government, from a government of technocrats to a government of the factions. But what leaked from a meeting that President 'Abbas had with the foreign ministers of Israel and the USA, respectively Tzipi Livni and Condoleezza Rice, claimed that 'Abbas was not supportive of any of these options.⁶⁷ The deteriorating security and political conditions had impelled

in October the first non-Egyptian Arab attempt for conciliation. This was from Qatar, represented in the person of its minister of foreign affairs, who came to Ramallah.⁶⁸ But the Qatari mediation failed to resolve the stubborn differences between the president and the prime minister.

A few days after his meeting with the American foreign secretary, 'Abbas informed his government that the American administration rejected the national agreement on the new version of the Prisoners' Document.⁶⁹ This negative American attitude may have been behind President 'Abbas' disregard to the document, and his all out new demand that Hamas government commits itself to the Arab Peace Initiative (the initiative of Prince (King) 'Abdullah, known as the initiative of Beirut Arab Summit). Haniyah emphasized that this Initiative constitutes a formidable predicament for the formation of a government of national unity.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, the president refrained from seeing the prime minister, which had further aggravated the conflict. However, since late October, the Palestinian member of the PLC and former candidate for the presidency, Mustafa al-Barghuthi, started another round of mediation between the president and the government. He even declared that an agreement had been reached on 80% of the issues, including the distribution of most of the ministerial posts and a preliminary draft of the political program.⁷¹ Meanwhile, Hamas had reportedly exhibited during these deliberations its readiness to accept nine out of the 14 ministerial posts (proportionate to its representation in the PLC), to give up the premiership and not to nominate any of its top leaders to a ministerial position.

But these reports were either exaggerated, or circulated by some interested foreign quarters that were pushing to abort all efforts for national reconciliation. Meanwhile, Washington had once more emphasized that the only acceptable Palestinian government is the one that accepts the condition of the Quartet, and the premier traveled in an Arab tour. Moreover, after his meeting with the American foreign secretary, President 'Abbas bluntly declared a deadlock,⁷² which, in the circumstances, created an impression that he was succumbing to fresh American pressure towards a decisive military solution on the ground. What confirmed this impression was the president's bombastic declaration before the PLC on 16/12/2006 of an early presidential and legislative elections, however, without fixing a particular date.⁷³ This move accelerated the political tensions in both the WB and GS. While the political associates of the president forcefully defended

his decision, Hamas spokesperson insisted that the president has no constitutional right to dissolve the PLC before completing its legal duration, and that his act is nothing but bypassing the results of a democratic and transparent elections.

During the third week of November, Khalid Mish'al visited Cairo to discuss two issues: the swapping of detainees, including the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas, and the Palestinian differences over the national government.⁷⁴ News leaked during this visit that the Egyptian side endorsed Hamas position on the national government, and expressed its desire to freshly crystallize a domestic Palestinian agreement. It appeared that President 'Abbas' declaration of an early election did not only surprise the Palestinians but also the concerned Arab states. In particular, Egypt, the chief Arab partner of the Palestinian issue, coolly received 'Abbas' move and refrained from supporting it. Meanwhile, by the end of the year, the aggravated tension and the frequent armed clashes triggered Jordan to invite 'Abbas and Haniyah for a meeting in Amman.⁷⁵ But this gathering did not materialize as both Hamas and 'Abbas exhibited reservations on the idea. Hamas, on her side, did not consider Jordan to be a neutral mediator, and was critical of its inability to contain the repercussions of the political-security crisis that it provoked with Hamas several months back. As for President 'Abbas, he did not like the Jordanian behavior of treating him on equal basis with Haniyah. Moreover, the rapid sequence of events had overtaken the Jordanian invitation and made it irrelevant.

With this political deadlock, security deterioration and increased casualties of the military clashes in Gaza and other towns of the Strip, it appeared that the Palestinian political mind was incapable to contain the crisis and supersede foreign intervention. Some reports spoke of a plan designed by Muhammad Dahlan, with the support of the American administration and some Arab countries, to wage a widespread and crushing military operation against the military wing of Hamas and the government's executive force. But this conspiracy failed, just like the other series of failures of the Bush administration in the region. There was no alternative but a quick Arab intervention that places Palestinian and Arab interests over and above the American considerations. This had subsequently crystallized in the invitation of the Saudi King 'Abdullah to both Hamas and Fatah for a meeting in Mecca, which had ultimately led to Mecca Agreement that marked a new stage in the Palestinian national struggle.

Conclusion

The tangible participation of Hamas in the legislative elections led to a heated and wide controversy. While some argued that Hamas had gone into this experience because it realized that the vehicle of resistance had come to its logical end, others maintained that the organization wanted to have a fair share of the cake in terms of authority and governance, which shall be proportionate to its political influence and popular support. Though it is not advisable to categorily dismiss this rational, particularly in the case of some Hamas leaders in the WB and GS, subsequent events during the course of the year 2006 showed that there was another pressing factor that impelled Hamas to pursue the route of elections, namely its genuine fear of a widespread military strike and earnest desire to protect and legitimize the resistance's political program. But, after its resounding victory in the elections, the leadership of Hamas had not seemingly realized that the Palestinian scenario is experiencing a delicate transitionary stage that nobody could possibly forecast its duration, though the political map as determined by the elections was expected to prevail for a long time. However, some argue that Hamas should have exerted more and ongoing effort towards the formation of a national government, even after the vote of confidence that its government won in the PLC. Others maintained that Hamas government lost the capacity of initiation when facing the serious riots that demanded the immediate payment of salaries. Nonetheless, the steadfastness of Hamas vis à vis the blockade and foreign pressure should be appreciated, as without it the Mecca meeting would not have been achieved.

The 2006 crisis should, on the other hand, be a wake up call for the other Palestinian forces, including Fatah, that had obstructed the formation of the national government. They should know that their very existence is dependent on their giving priority to the national call over the narrow sectarian interests. Their choice to leave Hamas government to face the music alone was a serious error of judgment that had neither taken on board the interest of the Palestinian nation and peoples, nor understood the resilience of Hamas and its determination to bear the responsibility that the peoples had bestowed upon its shoulders in the elections. Moreover, the outcome of these elections had confirmed the significant transformation, begun since the 1980s, in the Palestinian arena and, indeed, in the

entire Arab-Muslim world, namely the progressive rise of the Islamic trend. The national cause cannot progress if the other Palestinian forces continued to ignore, implicitly or explicitly, the rise of political Islam, or tried to arrest its progress.

The Palestinian crisis, as well as the Israeli-American stubbornness, had generated a series of differences and conflicts between Hamas government and the president's camp over policies, functions, authority and rule. Though Mecca Agreement provided a great chance to restore the Palestinian consensus and form a national government, Hamas victory and its leading role in the PA require the realization of some important merits that go beyond the formation of a national government. Of these is the restructuring of the PA on a national basis that ends the sectarian nature of the security forces and the bureaucracy that have effectively made the institutions of the PA offshoots of Fatah, even certain wings of the organization. However, it is necessary to emphasize that it will be very dangerous for the PA to be dependent on American-European aid, as this would in effect subject it to the Israeli will, and consequently substantially threatens the path of the entire Palestinian national struggle. Hence, the liberation of the Palestinian will from this risky dependency, and the return to the former practice of official and popular Arab-Islamic funding should be the major concern of the Palestinian government during the forthcoming phase.

Moreover, the PLO should be restructured and activated in such a way that it becomes the true representative of all Palestinian political trends and the Palestinian people at large. Hence, there would be no deviation from the national goals, namely the destruction of the Separation Wall, the uprooting of the occupation, the dismantling of the settlements and the rescue of Jerusalem, *al-Aqsa* Mosque and all the Islamic and Christian sanctuaries.

Endnotes

- ¹ See media coverage of this issue in *Asharq Alawsat*, *al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspapers, London, 1/1/2006; and *al-Hayat al-Jadidah* newspaper, Ramallah, 4/1/2006.
- ² See for example *al-Hayat*, 22/1/2006.
- ³ Opinion Polls and Survey Studies Center, An-Najah National University, <http://www.najah.edu/ARABIC/Centers/poll/poll16.htm>
- ⁴ Opinion Polls and Survey Studies Center, An-Najah National University, <http://www.najah.edu/ARABIC/Centers/poll/poll17.htm>
- ⁵ Opinion Polls and Survey Studies Center, An-Najah National University, <http://www.najah.edu/ARABIC/Centers/poll/poll18.htm>
- ⁶ Opinion Polls and Survey Studies Center, An-Najah National University, <http://www.najah.edu/ARABIC/Centers/poll/poll19.htm>
- ⁷ See media coverage on the results in *Asharq Alawsat*, *al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 27-30/1/2006.
- ⁸ The Palestinian National Information Centre (PNIC), <http://www.pnic.gov.ps/arabic/gover/elections/result.html>
- ⁹ For example, see Sa'ib 'Urayqat and Dahlan's statements in *al-Hayat*, 27/1/2006; and *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah, 28/1/2006.
- ¹⁰ *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, United Arab Emirates (UAE), 13/2/2006.
- ¹¹ *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 13/2/2006.
- ¹² *Al-Hayat*, 23/2/2006.
- ¹³ *Al-Hayat*, 20/2/2006.
- ¹⁴ For a comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of the international blockade of the Palestinian government, see Wael Ahmad Sa'ad, *al-Hisar* (The Siege) (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2006).
- ¹⁵ *Al-Hayat* and *Asharq Alawsat*, 5-7/3/2006.
- ¹⁶ *Al-Qabas* newspaper, Kuwait, 30/1/2006; and *al-Hayat*, 2/2/2006.
- ¹⁷ *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 19/4/2006.
- ¹⁸ *Al-Hayat*, 14-15, 20/2/2006.
- ¹⁹ *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 31/8/2006.
- ²⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 21, 28/2/2006.
- ²¹ *Al-Hayat* and *al-Seyassah* newspaper, Kuwait, 27/3/2006.
- ²² *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 23/8/2006.
- ²³ *Al-Hayat*, 17/5/2006; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 21/6/2006.
- ²⁴ About employees salary payments, see Palestine News Network (PNN), http://arabic.pnn.ps/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7813&Itemid=36
- ²⁵ *Asharq Alawsat*, 25/5/2006.
- ²⁶ The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 23/12/2006, <http://www.palestine-info.info/ar/default.aspx>
- ²⁷ *Al-Hayat*, 14/2/2006.
- ²⁸ *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 14/2/2006.
- ²⁹ *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 15/2/2006.
- ³⁰ *Assafir* and *al-Hayat*, 15, 22-23/2/2006; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 10/4/2006.
- ³¹ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah and *al-Hayat*, 21/4/2006.
- ³² Palestine News Agency (WAFA), 14/6/2006, <http://www.wafa.ps/body.asp?id=90728>
- ³³ *Annahar* newspaper, Beirut, 15/6/2006.
- ³⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 27/4/2006.
- ³⁵ *Haaretz* newspaper, 28/5/2006.
- ³⁶ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 29/4/2006; and see Sa'ad, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-50.

- ³⁷ *Addustour* and *al-Hayat*, 29/6/2006; *Asharq Alawsat*, 7/8/2006; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 9/8/2006.
- ³⁸ See for example *al-Hayat*, 2/6/2006-5/9/2006; and *Annahar*, 22/9/2006.
- ³⁹ Site of IslamOnline, 31/3/2006, <http://www.islam-online.net/Arabic/news/2006-03/31/article02.shtml>
- ⁴⁰ PIC, 17/5/2006.
- ⁴¹ *Al-Hayat* and *al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 9, 12/5/2006; and *Assafir*, 22/5/2006.
- ⁴² *Assafir*, 2/10/2006.
- ⁴³ *Assafir*, 20/10/2006; and *al-Hayat*, 29/10/2006.
- ⁴⁴ *Asharq Alawsat*, 11, 18/12/2006; PIC, 13-14/12/2006; and site of Arabs 48, 15/12/2006, <http://www.arabs48.com>
- ⁴⁵ See The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), The Outcome of Security Unrest till the End of November 2006, <http://www.piccr.org/dmddocuments/press%20releases/NUMBER%20OF%20KILLED%20PPL-%20SECURITY%20CHAOS%202006.pdf>
- ⁴⁶ Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, http://www.mezan.org/site_en/insecurity/insecurity_statistics.php
- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
- ⁴⁸ *Addustour* and *al-Khaleej*, 1/1/2006.
- ⁴⁹ The overwhelming majority of Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims are considering these operations as "martyrdom operations" while most Israelis and western writers and media are considering them as "suicide operations." We used the word "self-immolation" in this report to be as neutral as possible. However, such terms may need more discussions.
- ⁵⁰ *Al-Hayat* and *Alghad*, 18/4/2006.
- ⁵¹ *Al-Hayat*, 24/7/2006.
- ⁵² *Al-Hayat*, 18/8/2006.
- ⁵³ *Assafir*, 9/11/2006.
- ⁵⁴ See for example, the statement of Khalid Mish'al in *Almushahid Assiyasi* magazine, 5/2/2006, <http://www.almushahidassiyasi.com/ar/4/336/>
- ⁵⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 26/2/2006; and *Alghad*, 5/3/2006.
- ⁵⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 29/3/2006.
- ⁵⁷ See for example *Alquds* newspaper, Palestine, 18/4/2006; and *al-Hayat*, 9/7/2006.
- ⁵⁸ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 27/5/2006.
- ⁵⁹ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 1/6/2006.
- ⁶⁰ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 17/11/2006.
- ⁶¹ *Al-Hayat*, 11/11/2006; and *Asharq Alawsat*, 22/12/2006.
- ⁶² For information about the early version of the document, see *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 11/5/2006.
- ⁶³ On the various reactions to the document, see *al-Hayat* and *Assafir*, 12/5/2006. For full text see *Assafir*, 27/5/2006.
- ⁶⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 26/5/2006.
- ⁶⁵ *Al-Hayat*, 11-12, 19/6/2006.
- ⁶⁶ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 19/6/2006; and *al-Hayat*, 28/6/2006.
- ⁶⁷ *Al-Hayat*, 21/9/2006.
- ⁶⁸ *Al-Hayat* and *Assafir*, 3-5, 10-11/10/2006.
- ⁶⁹ *Albayan* newspaper, UAE, 1/10/2006.
- ⁷⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 21/9/2006.
- ⁷¹ *Al-Hayat*, 31/10/2006 and 8, 15/11/2006.
- ⁷² *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, *Assafir* and *al-Hayat*, 29/10/2006 and 1/12/2006.
- ⁷³ *Addustour* and *al-Hayat*, 10, 12/12/2006.
- ⁷⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 26/11/2006.
- ⁷⁵ *Addustour* and *al-Hayat*, 26/12/2006.

This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is glad to present to its readers The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006, the second in an annual series. The Report aims at monitoring the Palestinian issue through an informative and analytical approach. The Report covers the Palestinian internal political situation, issues concerning the Land and the holy sites, the economy, the Palestinian demographic indicators, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. It focuses on the Arab, Islamic and international stances towards the Palestinian issue. In addition, it devotes a chapter to discussing the Israeli war on Hizbullah and Lebanon.

This Report is distinct for its updated information till the end of 2006 and for its outstanding team of academics and experts.

Al-Zaytouna team did its best to be professional, scientific and objective. They hope that this Report be a distinguished addition to the Palestinian studies.

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006



Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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ISBN 978-9953-500-66-9



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