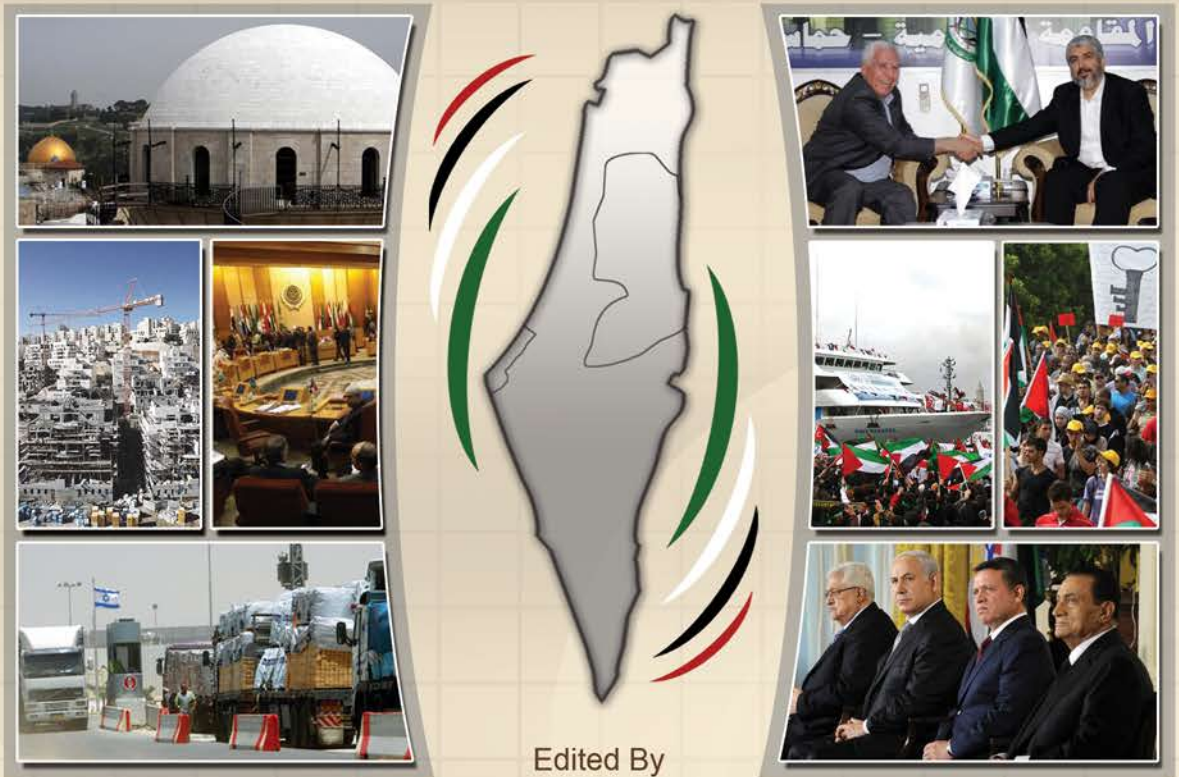


# The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11



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# Chapter One

## *The Internal Palestinian Scene*

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## **The Internal Palestinian Scene**

### ***Introduction***

The year 2010 was a year of stalemate in the internal Palestinian political scene. It continued to be dominated by two completely different political visions, each dominating a specific geographical domain. Hamas and Fatah failed to conclude a deal on security arrangements, thus hampering national reconciliation efforts. As a consequence municipal, legislative and presidential elections were postponed, and no effort was exerted to restructure the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority (PA) continued security coordination with Israel in the West Bank (WB), which reached unprecedented levels. Hamas continued to govern the Gaza Strip (GS).

The unified national project was conspicuously absent in the Palestinian arena, with the political and geographic schism weakening the response to Israeli policies. Israeli plans include building settlements, attempts to deny the right of return, targeting the resistance and preventing it from realizing national goals. However, other developments in the Arab world had direct impacts on the Palestinian arena, where on 3/5/2011 Hamas and Fatah signed an Egyptian-sponsored reconciliation agreement.<sup>1</sup> A ceremony on this occasion was held on 4/5/2011 in Cairo, with the participation of Mahmud ‘Abbas (Abu Mazin), Khalid Mish‘al and other leaders of the Palestinian parties.

### ***First: The Caretaker Government in Ramallah***

Prime Minister (PM) Salam Fayyad’s government continued in office notwithstanding its dismissal as illegitimate by resistance factions, and the controversy over its structure within Fatah. It has succeeded in weakening the security and ability of Palestinian resistance in the WB. Fayyad’s office committed to “employing all of the government’s energies and available resources, most especially the capacities of the Palestinian people, to complete the process of building institutions of the independent State of Palestine in order to establish a de facto state apparatus”<sup>2</sup> by the end of 2011.



No fundamental change took place in the structure and program of the government, with Fatah unable to attain through the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas its wish for greater representation in the government because the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) remained in abeyance. Moreover, the failure of national reconciliation efforts blocked the formation of a government of national unity that could change the agenda of the government. The prevailing agenda discarded armed resistance and focused on security cooperation with Israel. In addition to building institutions, it committed itself to achieving an economic recovery primarily based on foreign donations and support.

### **1. Postponement of Municipal Elections**

On February 7th, Fayyad’s government declared that it would initiate implementation of the necessary measures to conduct the municipal elections on 17/7/2010. But Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ) argued that in the absence of a Palestinian consensus any election would consolidate the schism,<sup>3</sup> and Hamas openly declared that it would not allow elections to be conducted in GS nor participate in the WB. Ziad al-Zaza, the minister of local governance in the caretaker government, said that all decisions taken by the government of Ramallah are illegitimate, and added, “Hamas will not participate in the local elections while the incursions and arrests are continuing and the elected members of the councils are sidelined.”<sup>4</sup> As a result of this rejection, and in accordance with the advice of the Palestinian elections committee, Fayyad’s government decided on April 25th not to hold elections in the GS.<sup>5</sup> On June 10th, Khalid al-Qawasmeh, the PA’s minister of local governance, declared the postponement of the elections in all Palestinian territories without fixing a new date for them. He said that this decision was based on Arab, regional and international advice to give a chance for national reconciliation and the lifting of the siege on GS.<sup>6</sup> Many PLO factions, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), Palestinian People’s Party (PPP), and the secretary-general of the Palestinian National Initiative, condemned this decision.<sup>7</sup>

## **2. Steps Towards Independence**

Meanwhile, the government of Salam Fayyad continued its 2009 program of achieving a Palestinian state by 2011. The program's stated aim was to "end the occupation and establish the State of Palestine on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital." Thus, it sought to complement "the PLO's endeavors at the regional and international levels." It aimed also "to complete the process of institution-building throughout the homeland and support peaceful popular resistance against the occupation."<sup>8</sup>

Each element of Fayyad's plan and its impact on the ground is described in more detail below:

### **a. Gradual Building of the State's Institutions in the WB**

Prime Minister Salam Fayyad announced the second part of his plan to establish a state, called Homestretch to Freedom. It contains the measures and priorities to be undertaken in the second year of the plan. It also "aims to complete the process of institution-building throughout the homeland and support peaceful popular resistance against the occupation." It seeks "to consolidate state institutions, founded on the principles of integrity, transparency, separation of powers and provision of safety and security to citizens." It envisions a state in which "all citizens will enjoy freedom, justice and equality in a democratic political system based on the principles of pluralism, separation of powers, peaceful transfer of power and respect for human rights." The plan includes ambitious and vital projects, such as the establishment of the Palestinian Central Bank and establishing a Palestinian currency and the issuing of deposit bonds.

The plan added that the government "develop and approve the Law on the Compulsory Civil Service of Youth" and will review "national legislation and policies on labor and employment to ensure equal opportunities."<sup>9</sup>

### **b. Support of Peaceful Popular Resistance Through Peaceful Marches**

This drive focused on a campaign to resist Israeli annexation of certain land in the WB. During the opening session of the fifth Bil'in International Conference on the Popular Struggle in Ramallah, attended by Robert Serry, the United Nations (UN) Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as Arab and international ambassadors, Fayyad emphasized that various strategies, based around peaceful popular resistance, should complement each other to establish the state of Palestine on the 4/6/1967 borders.<sup>10</sup>



### c. Boycotting Israeli Settlement Agricultural Products

The PA published a black list of 200 products produced in the Israeli settlements of the WB, and urged the Palestinians to boycott them.<sup>11</sup> At the end of a week-long drive “to clean” the Palestinian market of WB settlement products, Fayyad handed out leaflets bearing the names and pictures of 500 blacklisted items, ranging from peanuts to door frames.

Approximately three thousand volunteers have visited more than 255 thousand Palestinian homes all over the WB to help householders differentiate between WB settlement products, and the “Israeli” products that the campaign does not target. Fayyad stated that this home-to-home campaign “depends in the first place on the awareness of the citizen.”<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, Fayyad launched a new campaign called “Shop-to-Shop” which is a part of a months-old boycott door-to-door campaign aimed at “cleansing” WB settlement products. The volunteers, mostly university students, planned to visit more than 66 thousand shops across the WB to inspect them for WB settlement products.<sup>13</sup>

Fayyad also participated personally in the 2010 olive harvest, focusing on two villages; Iraq Burin in southern Nablus and Deir al-Ghusun north of Tulkarem, which were subjected to continuous attacks by Jewish settlers. During the campaign, Fayyad emphasized that the olive tree is a symbol of the Palestinians’ commitment to their land, and that the smallest olive tree is more rooted than the settlements and walls.<sup>14</sup>

Even a cursory look at the policies of Fayyad’s government, including the strategy of peaceful resistance of Israel, reveals that they do not go beyond the ceiling of the occupation itself. In fact, the Fayyad government has been an ideal security reality for the Israelis, undertaking all the services and civil responsibilities required under the Geneva Protocols. Hence, the sarcastic dubbing the occupation as “five star occupation” by many of its victims.

### 3. The Palestinian State and the Refugees

On 2/4/2010, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* asked PM Fayyad if his plan to establish a Palestinian state in 2011 takes into consideration the need to absorb refugees. He answered that the “Palestinians would have the right to reside within the State of Palestine.”<sup>15</sup>

These declarations provoked condemnation from various Palestinian factions. ‘Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas’ political bureau, dismissed Fayyad’s statements as compatible with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu’s project of ending resistance by tempting the Palestinian people with power and money. Al-Rishq also denounced Fayyad’s Passover greetings to the Israelis, and accused him of “not belonging to the Palestinian people...he is merely selling them illusions.” He predicted that the Palestinian people will discard Fayyad, and never accept “national degradation,” asking Fatah to distance itself from him.<sup>16</sup>

For its part, the PFLP considered that Fayyad had ignored historical facts and bypassed long-established Palestinian national goals and priorities. These priorities include the Palestinian right of return to usurped land in accordance with the UN resolution 194, and the unconditional release of all detainees being held as prisoners of war. Moreover, the PFLP claims Fayyad has propagated rosy illusions to a reality that is characterized by criminality, bitterness and pain, and by escalating atrocities against the Palestinian people, land and nation.<sup>17</sup>

Khalid al-Batsh, a leader of PIJ, responded to Fayyad’s statement by saying that the prime minister has not been chosen by the Palestinian people to speak about their non-negotiable right of return. He added that any solution that does not guarantee the return of the refugees to the Palestinian territories that were occupied by Israel in 1948, does not represent the solution wanted by the Palestinian people, and is therefore illegitimate and must be rejected.<sup>18</sup>

#### **4. The Government, the PLO and Fatah**

The relationship between Fayyad and the PLO faced a barrage of criticism as a result of the presumed encroachment of the former on the functions of the latter. This compelled Fayyad to emphasize that the declaration of the Palestinian state is the prerogative of the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and in cooperation with the international community.<sup>19</sup> He also stressed that the PLO is the “patron” of all aspects of the Palestinian issue, and not merely the political dimension.<sup>20</sup>

The major dispute was between Fayyad’s government and Fatah, where the latter was not afforded its appropriate share of cabinet positions. Fatah urged the president of the PA to introduce changes in the government’s structure. Moreover, Fatah’s bloc in the suspended PLC made critical remarks on the government’s performance (Fatah had 11 ministers out of 22) and asked Fayyad to call for a special session to discuss their concerns.





The Fatah bloc in the PLC claimed that it prepared a concept paper on the activation of the functions and supervisory role of the members of the parliament (MPs), during the suspension of the PLC, including the intensification of the work of parliamentary groups, particularly the consolidation of their supervisory role.<sup>21</sup>

The final communiqué of the third meeting of Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) recommended that the President undertakes a cabinet reshuffle in accordance with his constitutional power, without going in to specific details of the extent of this reshuffle. Some high level Fatah leaders claimed that the FRC wanted all major ministries, such as the interior, finance and foreign affairs, to be allocated to members of Fatah instead of being the preserve of close associates of Fayyad. Countering this, some of Fayyad's top advisors maintained that he had no objection to Fatah members occupying any ministry position, except the Ministry of Finance, which he had reserved exclusively for himself.<sup>22</sup>

From this political wrangling, all that was publicly declared was that Fatah was demanding sovereignty over ministries, which was not realized in 2011. Some sources maintained that 'Abbas and Fayyad were in agreement on a reshuffle that includes seven ministries only, but without specifying a time frame for it.<sup>23</sup>

## **5. The Government and the Resistance**

As a part of its obligations under treaties concluded with Israel, the government in the WB maintained its security cooperation and coordination with Israel, considering armed resistance harmful to the Palestinian national project.

Within this framework, PM Fayyad condemned the attack in the south of Hebron in which an Israeli soldier was killed and three others wounded. Fayyad warned against the dangers of being dragged into a cycle of violence which would prove to be harmful to national interests and serve the Israeli settlement project. He called for defending peaceful popular resistance against the Israeli settlement building and occupation policies. This resistance coupled with the building of state's institutions, constitute the backbone of the political struggle that the PLO leads.<sup>24</sup> But Fayyad did not relate accelerating Israeli settlement building activity to the security cooperation which had, in fact, led to the expansion of the Israeli settlement building and the Judiazation of Jerusalem much more than during any previous period.

Fayyad also condemned the second Hebron attack at the end of August, in which four Israeli settlers were killed. He repeated the same caution over armed resistance, and rejected, failing to show an understanding of the local factors and the misery and degradation caused by the Israeli occupation of Hebron. He considered alternative views to his own to be empty slogans contradictory to Palestinian interests.<sup>25</sup>

In other statements, Fayyad said that there was no security problem resulting from Hamas' opposition in the WB as long as this is done within the law, even if it propagated "defamation and excesses." But he added the caveat that "any leniency on the part of the PA in confronting whoever tries to do what he wants in the time and manner he opts for will have serious repercussions."<sup>26</sup>

In an unprecedented question and answer session organized by The Israel Project at a private home in Manhattan, attended by 65 businesses, religious and community leaders, Fayyad outlined his vision. He said that violence "has to be dealt out of the equation permanently, regardless of what happens in the peace process." Security, he said, was a vital interest both for Israelis and Palestinians and those who used violence to advance their agendas needed to be prosecuted and punished through due process.

Asked about continuing incitement in the West Bank against Israel and Jews in school text books and in the media, Fayyad said his government was committed to an "incitement-free environment." and he added, "I don't think one can ever say that we have done everything that could possibly be done ... but we are trying." Fayyad also said, "Incitement is a problem and we see it as such." He stressed that using places of worship to whip up hatred was particularly inadmissible.<sup>27</sup>

On 16/9/2010, a report on Fayyad was issued by analyst Nathan Thrall entitled "Our Man in Palestine". The author was told by David Welch, a former United States of America (US/ USA) assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs who helped oversee the Dayton mission until December 2008, that in 'Abbas's appointment of an emergency cabinet led by Salam Fayyad, the US felt it had "the best Palestinian Authority government in history." The report considered Fayyad a prime minister who "oversees a government that in a recent Global Integrity Index tied with Iraq as the sixth most corrupt in the world."<sup>28</sup>

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intelligence and Atomic Energy, Dan Meridor, revealed that only one leader of the entire Palestinian leadership enjoys



the respect of the Israeli political leadership, namely Salam Fayyad, whom President Shimon Peres described as “the Palestinians first Ben-Gurionist.” Meridor opined that it is important to cooperate with Fayyad and help him in his efforts to establish a Palestinian state within two years in full coordination with Israel.<sup>29</sup>

## **6. Measures Against Religiosity**

Within the drive against the resistance and its infrastructure, the PA Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs took a number of measures. It prohibited a number of Friday preachers from delivering speeches in mosques. It also ordered the mosques to lower the volume of its loudspeakers whether when used for *Athan* (call for the prayer) or the recitation of the Qur’an. Hamas and other resistance factions rejected these measures, which they dismissed as a crackdown on religion and religiosity.

In a press conference in the GS, Fawzi Barhoum, the spokesperson of Hamas, held Fatah squarely responsible for this “campaign against the mosques and the pious people in the WB,” and warned of the consequences and repercussions of this dangerous move. Barhoum condemned “this brutal war against our religion, sanctities and religious values,” adding that it seemed to aim at the destruction of ethics in favor of a culture of submissiveness and impudence in order to facilitate normalization with the Israeli occupation that could lead to the liquidation of the Palestinian issue. He gave examples of incidents in which mosques’ speakers and Imams were attacked in the WB. The spokesperson added criticism of Fatah for simultaneously pursuing a plan to grant licenses for alcohol sales, bars and nightclubs, and by allowing the Jericho casino to reactivate and resume its businesses.<sup>30</sup>

In the same vein, Palestinian resistance factions had accused, in a joint press conference in GS, the caretaker government in Ramallah of orchestrating a campaign against the Islamic ‘*Aqidah* (Islamic Belief), and a parallel one against the Palestinian people in general. They added that this campaign is beneficial only to settlers searching for tranquility, and will serve to divert the attention and interests of the Palestinian youth from the mosques to the nightclubs.<sup>31</sup>

In response to this barrage of accusations, Fatah Spokesperson Osama al-Qawasmeh, issued a communiqué on behalf of Fatah’s Office of Information and Culture accusing Hamas of striving to push the Palestinian people into an arena

of conflicts and religious and tribal sectarianism. Fatah stated that it considered these futile calls doomed to failure. It also accused Hamas of taking advantage of some “administrative and organizational decisions,” undertaken by the minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, who had for many years been in the Hamas camp, to divide Muslims. Fatah argued that a minister has every right to take the necessary decisions to end partisan dominance over the mosques.<sup>32</sup> If such statements reflect the position of Fatah, this declaration is useful in demonstrating the confused and contradictory state that the movement has been experiencing. While, on one side, it was significantly marginalized from the decision making center of the Fayyad government; on the other side, the patron and solicitor of its policies.

### ***Second: The Caretaker Government in the GS***

Based on its resounding victory in the 2006 general election and in accordance with the dictates of Palestinian law, the caretaker government in the GS viewed itself as the one and only legitimate caretaker government and it continued to perform its affairs as such. However, in effect, this government was heavily preoccupied with the aftermath of the Israeli war on the GS, and attempts at lifting of the continuous siege on GS, which has tightened further, thanks to the Egyptian government. Moreover, in view of the stumbling of reconciliation efforts, insufficient aid had arrived to rebuild what the war had destroyed in GS.

Notwithstanding the brutality of the blockade and the inability of the Palestinian people to rebuild what Israel had destroyed in the 2008–2009 aggression, they remained steadfast, and GS witnessed some modest attempts to rebuild a number of destroyed houses. Amongst those attempts were some initiated by a couple of Emirates philanthropic societies, and similar Qatari initiatives have also been reported. Nonetheless, this is far below the desired target of rebuilding thousands of houses and institutions.

Moreover, the government under the premiership of Isma‘il Haniyyah remained engaged in the issue of lifting the siege, providing the salaries for its civil and military personnel, administrating the crossings and ensuring freedom of movement for the Palestinian people from and to GS.



At this juncture it is necessary to highlight an important and primary, but customarily marginalized issue, namely the influx of weaponry to the GS and its continuous development from within; coupled with the digging of internal defensive tunnels and the preparations required to repel any aggression. Notwithstanding the unwritten ceasefire, and the stoppage of the launching of rockets and other military operations, this development has transferred the resistance to an unprecedented level of being able to confront aggression. It can be speculated that one of the important factors that deterred the Israelis from launching a new war on GS as with Lebanon, is their apprehension of potential repercussions in view of the advancing confrontational ability of the resistance.

In another vein, the Palestinians have succeeded to rally popular, international, and even official support against the siege, most clearly represented by humanitarian aid convoys that came from Europe and the Arab and Muslim world to lift the blockade. The first such convoy was the Artery of Life convoy, led by George Galloway and other activists from 17 countries, which successfully arrived in GS on 6/1/2010 after a 31-day journey from London. It is worth noting here that this convoy faced considerable difficulty in Egypt, including violence in al-'Arish between activists and the Egyptian police that resulted in casualties on both sides, which motivated the Egyptian security apparatus to place Galloway in their blacklist. However, the delay of this convoy instigated a wave of anger in GS that triggered skirmishes along the frontiers between some Palestinians and Egyptian soldiers in which an Egyptian soldier was killed and several wounded on both sides. The Egyptian authorities held Hamas responsible for the killing, but the government of Isma'il Haniyyah claimed that the soldier was killed by a bullet in the back from his own colleague.<sup>33</sup>

Two Arab parliamentary delegations visited the GS. The first, composed of 22 MPs, arrived on 15/2/2010, and the second, composed of 47 MPs, arrived on 6/6/2010.<sup>34</sup>

On 31/5/2010, Israel forcefully confronted the Freedom Flotilla that was carrying various forms of humanitarian aid to the GS. The Mavi Marmara ship, which carried 581 activists, mostly Turks, was violently intercepted by Israeli commandos in international waters, killing nine and wounding 26. Israeli forces arrested the activists, but subsequently returned them to their countries. The raid sparked widespread international condemnation of Israel.<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, this can be seen as a major political and media defeat for Israel, which was placed in a tight corner and saw a significant worsening in relations with Turkey. Meanwhile, the Freedom Flotilla has become a symbol for those intent on breaking the siege of GS.

The visit of the Secretary-General of the Arab League, ‘Amr Musa, to the Strip on 13/6/2010 was hailed by Isma‘il Haniyyah as a practical step towards ending the blockade. In this first visit since the end of the war on GS in 2009, Musa called for the end of the imposed siege on GS, emphasizing that all Arabs and the entire world reject the siege and support the Palestinians. He demanded that a Palestinian reconciliation deal be concluded immediately, and called upon Gazans to exert pressure on their leaders to achieve this goal.<sup>36</sup>

The caretaker government in the GS also welcomed a visit from the European Union (EU) High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton.<sup>37</sup> This visit and other expected visits to the Strip by ministers of European countries were viewed as an indirect European recognition of the Hamas government. Official recognition did not follow.

PM Haniyyah also welcomed to Gaza a delegation from “The Elders” committee, led by former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, and also included Lakhdar Brahimi, the former UN Envoy and former Foreign Minister of Algeria, and Ela Bhatt, founder of the million-strong Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) of India.<sup>38</sup> Haniyyah commended the efforts of the members of “The Elders” and their visit to the besieged Strip, and expressed his hope that such delegations would prove to be positive developments in favor of the Palestinian people.<sup>39</sup>

The German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Guido Westerwelle, visited GS on 8/11/2010, in a bid to pressure Israel to loosen its blockade. Subsequently, on 24/11/2010, Franco Frattini, the Italian minister of foreign affairs, undertook a similar visit, and on 17/12/2010, Tonio Borg, the foreign minister of Malta followed suit, publicly calling for a total lifting of the blockade of GS.<sup>40</sup>

In an attempt to ease the impact of the siege and to commit the other Palestinian political factions in the administration of the besieged GS, the government suggested in early 2011 to restructure the cabinet, and offered ministerial positions to some factions. The PIJ declined participation in a government that it viewed

as an extension of the Oslo treaties that it rejects; while the PFLP rejected the restructuring on the grounds that it would consolidate the state of schism in Palestinian politics.

The GS government launched an extensive campaign against a large number of agents implanted by Israel during its occupation of GS. The Ministry of Interior declared that it has uncovered several spy rings that use certain websites, exploiting the desperate needs of the citizens under siege, to recruit them to be Israeli agents in GS. However, the ministry initiated an awareness-raising campaign to confront this danger.<sup>41</sup>

Ihab al-Ghusein, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior, said that Israeli forces are gathering information in preparation for a new aggression against the GS. In particular, they singled out institutions, cars and houses of Hamas leaders. He announced the arrest of some agents who penetrated the factions by claiming to have joined the resistance, and maintained that these and other agents had a demonstrable role in the Israeli war on GS. The Ministry of Interior displayed some of the electronic devices that were used to disseminate and receive information from the Israeli intelligence officers.<sup>42</sup>

The Interior Minister in GS, Fathi Hammad, mentioned that the Interior Ministry's security apparatus discovered a Palestinian agent who had been spying for Israel since 1972. He added that this apparatus discovered new Israeli methods of espionage, and had succeeded in confronting the agents.<sup>43</sup>

The caretaker government in the GS sentenced to death two Israeli spies who caused the deaths of numerous members of the Palestinian resistance and the wounding of others. The head of military justice in GS Colonel Ahmad 'Atallah, said that these sentences were passed down after exhausting all procedures of appeal.<sup>44</sup> However, some legal and societal organizations denounced capital punishment on the assumption that they "violated the fundamentals of the law that prevent the execution of capital punishment without the prior approval of the head of the state."<sup>45</sup>

Within the government's drive to publicize and focus on the issue of the detainees in Israeli prisons, Isma'il Haniyyah declared 2010 to be the year of the Palestinian detainees in Israel, and demanded that their legitimate cause be addressed in all Arab and international forums. While launching a national campaign to defend the rights of these detainees, Haniyyah announced the formation of The High Supreme

National Committee for the Support of Detainees. He called for an Arab-Islamic fundraising organization to collect donations to support the detainees and their families, and to enable the Ministry of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs to file cases against Israel in international courts.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Third: Dialogue and Putting the Palestinian Political House in Order***

Palestinian political reconciliation was perhaps the defining story of 2010, aside from the occupation itself. The attempts and maneuvers around reconciliation are detailed, but are worth considering in detail as they reveal the dynamics at play on the Palestinian political scene. While insisting in the past that its paper on the reconciliation issue should be signed by all the Palestinian factions verbatim, Egypt had by 2010 agreed to annex to it a paper agreeable to all the factions. However, despite this apparent progress, the deadlock on the reconciliation issue had, in reality, continued.

Initially, Fatah had insisted that Hamas should sign the Egyptian paper, and President ‘Abbas refused to have any meetings with Khalid Mish‘al, head of the Hamas political bureau, before this signature. In this respect, ‘Abbas said that within an hour of Hamas’ signature his administration would meet with them, but not before. He also emphasized that the signing ceremony of the reconciliation agreement should take place in Egypt.<sup>47</sup>

Anxious to strike a reconciliation deal, Nabil Sha‘th, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, tried to mediate between the two conflicting parties, and visited the GS for this very specific purpose. But the differences between the two sides were too deep to be resolved. Commenting on this visit, PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas said that Sha‘th did not travel to GS on his own initiative but in compliance with a PA decision. ‘Abbas denied any connection between this visit and the reconciliation, and added, “Sha‘th’s visit was just under this pretext, and his visit to Haniyyah’s house was beyond his terms of reference, and is unacceptable.”<sup>48</sup> Some non-aligned personalities, under the leadership of independent politician Yasir al-Wadih, also exerted some efforts in the interest of the reconciliation, but to no avail.<sup>49</sup>





Meanwhile, President Mahmud ‘Abbas, informed Libya, Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Jordan that he would not attend the Arab summit scheduled in Libya on 27/3/2010 to discuss the reconciliation issue if Khalid Mish‘al was also due to attend.<sup>50</sup> Mish‘al refused to comment on President ‘Abbas’ declarations and said that Hamas was ready to sign the Palestinian reconciliation agreement before or after the summit in Libya.<sup>51</sup>

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait reiterated that the Egyptian reconciliation paper is submitted for signature only, and that all comments will be considered only during implementation.<sup>52</sup> Hamas repeated its accusations of US obstruction of the reconciliation process, and Mish‘al went as far as to say that the US government had essentially vetoed reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah.<sup>53</sup>

However, despite the stalling over negotiations, there were increasing indications that Hamas was prepared to be flexible provided that some of its wishes were adhered to. These wishes included the proposed provisional leadership to take charge until the re-election of PLO institutions, which “should not be hampered” in carrying out government functions, and that President Mahmud ‘Abbas forms, in partnership with Hamas, an elections committee and a supreme security committee to supervise the implementation of the reconciliation agreement, as well as to rebuild and restructure security forces in the WB and GS.

The delay in concluding the reconciliation agreement meant that the originally proposed election date of 28/6/2010, had to be postponed, requiring agreement on a new date. Other proposals demanded that the Hamas recommendations must “be annexed to the Egyptian paper and become part and parcel of it,” and that it must be signed by the relevant parties as well as the patrons and guarantors of the reconciliation agreement.<sup>54</sup>

After accusations and counter accusations between the two parties regarding the delay of reconciliation, and the failure of a number of mediation attempts by, inter alia, KSA, Qatar and Turkey, a new breakthrough took place. In a meeting at Mecca between Khalid Mish‘al and the head of Egyptian General Intelligence Service ‘Omar Suleiman, the latter said that he would have no objection to a Fatah and Hamas agreement on the understanding that the proposed agreement address the latter’s remarks on the Egyptian paper before its signature.<sup>55</sup>

This breakthrough coincided with the resumption of direct negotiations with Israel and the intransigence of its government on the issue of freezing the Israeli

settlement building. Many connected the failure of negotiations with Israel and this breakthrough, for the PA, supported by Egypt, would find it tactically useful to reactivate the reconciliation effort in order to put pressure on Israel during negotiations.

The first session of reconciliation talks was held in Damascus on 24/9/2010, during which it was agreed to form a consensus elections' committee and a consensus elections' court, fix a new date for the elections, and to form a caretaker leadership to be in charge until the PLO is restructured in accordance with the provisions in the Egyptian reconciliation paper. 'Azzam al-Ahmad, a member of the Fatah Central Committee and the head of its parliamentary bloc, said that the meeting between Fatah and Hamas resolved three issues: the elections, the elections' court and the PLO. But, he indicated that the issue of security remained pending, and would only be resolved with the help of experts in this area.<sup>56</sup>

Ali Barakah, the senior Hamas political official in Lebanon, said that the movement would discuss with Fatah in Damascus the resumption of Palestinian dialogue under Egyptian patronage. Talks would aim at the formation of a supreme security committee to supervise the reactivation and restructuring of the security forces. He explained that "the two movements had agreed in their previous meeting in Damascus to rebuild and restructure the security forces in the WB and GS concurrently, and not in GS alone," while the formation of the security committee to supervise this rebuilding and restructuring was postponed to the next meeting.<sup>57</sup>

Hamas leader Mahmud al-Zahhar stated that "Fatah has agreed on Hamas's point of view regarding the central elections committee, the judicial committee on elections, and the interim leadership in the PLO, which Fatah had been previously rejected."<sup>58</sup>

In an attempt to resolve the final crucial issue, namely the security arrangements, the two movements met once more in Damascus on 9/11/2010. But the meeting ended acrimoniously with each side blaming the other for the failure to reconcile. While Fatah blamed Hamas for not being consistent in its demands, the latter claimed that Fatah insisted on dominating the supreme committee that was to oversee the security forces in the WB and GS, adamantly refusing Hamas participation in it. Hamas also complained that Fatah wanted to restrict the restructuring of the security forces to the GS only. Hamas suspected that the US and Israel wanted to veto the whole process of reconciliation. Some Palestinian sources attributed the



failure of this meeting to the insistence of Fatah, specifically Majid Faraj, head of Palestinian general intelligence in rejecting any changes to the security forces in the occupied WB.<sup>59</sup>

Some Palestinian sources revealed to *al-Hayat* newspaper that the two sides reached a compromise whereby previous understandings were rewritten. The revised version stipulated that the two movements would name the members of the elections committee, but it ignored the proviso in the September version that this consultation be by “consensus.” However, when Hamas suggested that the phrasing of the compromise be applied to the judicial committee on elections, Fatah objected on the grounds that the judiciary “is independent, and that this independence should not be infringed upon by the movements.” Ultimately, the two sides agreed to add the following phrase, “There should be no differences on the judges” between the Palestinian factions.

On the issue of the provisional leadership, scheduled to be in charge until the reactivation of the institutions of the PLO, Fatah suggested an addition to the expression “the functions of the expected caretaker leadership cannot be annulled”—that was agreed upon previously in the first session—with the phrase “Without contradicting the functions of the Executive Committee of the PLO.” When reviewing the date of the forthcoming elections, the two sides agreed that it should be within eight to twelve months from the signature of the Egyptian reconciliation paper so that the two parties could prepare for the elections in a “free and fair environment in the WB and GS.”

The stumbling block remained the fifth point, namely the security issue. Previously, the two sides had agreed to “rebuild and restructure the security forces in the WB and GS,” but the formation of a supreme security committee, remained unresolved. Sources revealed that the astonishing development in the meeting was the insistence of Majid Faraj, head of Palestinian general intelligence, that there would be no partnership in security matters. Fatah was insisting that political and electoral partnerships were possible, but in security this is impossible. Fatah’s stance was unusual as security forces are commonly founded on national basis without participation or partnership. The Fatah position was viewed by Hamas as a retreat from the previous agreements and a setback to creating conducive environment for reconciliation.<sup>60</sup>

It is worth noting that the delegation led by Majid Faraj to discuss the security issue reveals the position of weakness of Fatah in having no real authority over the security forces and security policy in the WB. Faraj's refusal to discuss WB security forces kept reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas in limbo. However, the changes that swept the Arab world at the beginning of 2011, and other significant Hamas-Fatah developments—Haniyyah inviting 'Abbas to meet, and the latter's acceptance—the reconciliation agreement was finally signed between the two parties, on 3/5/2011. A ceremony was held on the next day, with a wide participation of all Palestinian factions. Despite Fatah acceptance of Hamas reservations and resolution of the security issue, there is still a long way to go for the two parties.<sup>61</sup> For the rest of the year 2011, it was evident that President 'Abbas used the agreement for a tactical approach, as no serious steps were taken for its implementation. For several months, only the question of nominating the PA's prime minister was discussed. On the other hand, PLO leadership actively used its position after the agreement, as legal and undisputed leadership of all Palestinian people, to present the application of Palestine to get full membership in the UN. Only when this application was hindered by US, and Hamas got more popularity after the Gilad Shalit exchange deal with 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, 'Abbas took some minor measures by the end of 2011 (see more details in *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12*).

## ***Fourth: The PLO and the Presidency of the PA***

### **1. Unchanged Structure and Program**

Notwithstanding the dubious legitimacy of the institutions of the PLO after the expiry of the term of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), the Executive Committee and the Central Council, Fatah, which dominated decision making processes, continued to utilize them. For example, it focused the meetings of the Executive Committee of the PLO on taking decisions legitimizing the negotiations with Israel. However, the difference in the outlooks of Fatah and Fayyad's government was reflected in the difficult relationship of the latter with the PLO.

The conflict between the PLO and the government over the “establishment of the Palestinian state” was so sensitive that Fayyad frequently emphasized that the



PLO is the authority on this issue. Despite that, he continued to initiate and pursue policies on the ground independently and without consultation with the PLO and the Palestinian presidency.

Though the restructuring of the PLO was an item of the reconciliation proposal that all the factions had endorsed, all efforts to implement it on the ground failed because of differences on the crucial security issue. However, the Damascus dialogue of 24/9/2010 between Fatah and Hamas resulted in the re-inclusion of the expression that addressed the “framework of the provisional leadership” of the PLO. It stated that the functions of this caretaker leadership cannot be annulled, being a national consensus that had been agreed upon.<sup>62</sup> Fatah, on the other hand, demanded later that those functions must not contradict the functions of the Executive Committee of the PLO.<sup>63</sup>

It is worth noting at this juncture that one of main reasons for the continuation of the schism and failure of reconciliation attempts was the fundamental political difference on negotiations and peace settlement with Israel, as well as differences in attitude on resistance to the Israeli occupation. So fundamental are these issues that any agreement that does not tackle them is bound to be vulnerable.

## **2. A Crisis with the PFLP**

Though the peace process remained stalled, the Executive Committee of the PLO agreed on 8/5/2010 to resume indirect negotiations with the Israelis. This had also been agreed to by the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-Up Committee of the Arab League during a meeting in Cairo.

Both Hamas and PIJ criticized these negotiations, viewing them as slavish submission to the *fait accompli* policy pursued by Israel. Both the PFLP and the PPP voted in the Executive Committee of the PLO against this decision, while the DFLP voiced their reservations on it.<sup>64</sup>

Concurrently with the return of the PA to direct negotiations, despite no progress being made through indirect negotiations, the Executive Committee of the PLO faced a new crisis. On 26/9/2010, the PFLP declared in a press conference that it would freeze its participation in PLO meetings, in protest against the lack of inclusive decision-making on crucial issues, most notably the resumption of negotiations with Israel. The PFLP, the second largest faction in the PLO, cautioned against “the grave consequences and repercussions of the policy of surrender and return to the negotiation table on the basis of the American-Israeli conditions.”

A communiqué delivered by Khalidah Jarrar, a member of the political bureau of the PFLP, emphasized that the conduct of negotiations in this manner would sideline the backing of the UN and its resolutions on the Palestinian issue; would impose an American patronage and make negotiations the only possibility. The communiqué went on to say that the PFLP's decision was motivated by organizational considerations related to the decision making process within the PLO's framework and leadership. The Front warned against what it described as "The slavish, submissive attitude of the inner core leadership of the PLO, and its catastrophic consequences on the Palestinian issue and on the Organization's program, charter and national project."<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, Mahir al-Tahir, the politburo member of the PFLP announced in Damascus that the above position of the PFLP did not indicate its incorporation into "alternative bodies" to the PLO.<sup>66</sup> However, Jamil Mizher, a member of the PFLP Central Committee, stated that suspension of participation in the sessions of the PLO was a PFLP protest against the resumption of negotiations using a formula that was evidently futile and meaningless. He added that it does not mean withdrawal from the PLO, "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." Mizher maintained that this position is a card in 'Abbas' hands with which he can defy any side that tries to force him to continue the negotiations irrespective of the current Israeli intransigence.<sup>67</sup>

### **3. Threatening to Resign**

In view of the American failure to convince Israel to stop settlement building, 'Abbas had once more threatened to resign from the presidency of the PA. In this respect, he said that if Israel fails to stop settlement building and American support for negotiations wanes, he will move towards ending limited Palestinian self-rule in the occupied territories, not accepting the role of nominal president of a non-existing authority.<sup>68</sup> But soon afterwards 'Abbas retreated, and said on 19/12/2010 to the Jordanian newspaper *Alrai* newspaper that he will not relinquish the presidency of the PA, and that he is a man of "a national project," and that the dissolution of the PA would lead to chaos. He said that Palestinians must think of other methods to corner Israel. 'Abbas described the Israeli occupation as the cheapest in history, as "Israel occupies but does not meet its responsibilities or obligations. On the ground, Israel holds the authority; while authority is ours in name only. This ridiculous equation should be resolved."<sup>69</sup>



The Palestinian president declared that he would lead a drive to refer the Palestinian issue to the UN Security Council instead of relying on negotiations that failed to even freeze settlement building. But ‘Abbas stopped short of preparing a draft resolution that dismisses settlement building as illegal. He emphasized that he would not take unilateral actions, such as a declaration of an independent state, which Israel said it would strongly resist. The PLO did not also rush to dissolve the PA, which it considered as its last resort.

In 2010 five countries recognized the Palestinian state: Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia and Ecuador.

Meanwhile, corruption continued to be rife, and was particularly put in the limelight by former Palestinian intelligence officer Fahmi Shabaneh al-Tamimi (discussed in detail below). This mushrooming corruption had seriously put in doubt the viability of the state-building project, which, to many, could not be achieved without liberating the WB, dismantling all settlements, and regaining Jerusalem, the heart of the desired Palestinian state and the basis for its existence.

A detailed look at the position of ‘Abbas after the abject failure of negotiations, despite of the far reaching concessions that he offered, reveals that he was left with no tangible or realistic alternative. Each action suggested by ‘Abbas was in need of serious momentum, but no such momentum was forthcoming.

#### **4. The Corruption Scandal**

A new crisis emerged in the midst of the failure of negotiations with Israel and the increasing American pressure exerted on the PA leadership. Accusations of financial corruption were filed by Fahmi Shabaneh al-Tamimi, a senior officer of the PA’s Preventive Security Service (PSS).

On 29/1/2010, in an exclusive interview with *The Jerusalem Post*, Shabaneh cited several specific cases of alleged corruption within Fatah and the PA.<sup>70</sup> Then, on 9/2/2010, Channel 10 television in Israel aired a program on corruption at the office of President ‘Abbas that was reportedly based on documents that Shabaneh had assembled over the previous six years. The officer provided documents and an embarrassing video from 2008, in which ‘Abbas Bureau Head Rafiq al-Husseini is seen in an intimate situation with his secretary and allegedly trying to coax a women who asked to work in the office into having intimate relations with him. Moreover, Shabaneh accused the PLO’s solicitor in Jordan ‘Allam al-Ahmad,

brother of the member of the Executive Committee of the PLO ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, of receiving a bribe of \$1.95 million\* in lieu of fictitious deal to buy a piece of land in Jordan. Shabaneh also provided documents that proved the disappearance of \$700 million from the funds of the PA in corruption cases that the Palestinian attorney general had already ordered investigation in to.<sup>71</sup>

These alleged corruption cases provoked uproar and turmoil among Palestinians, which encouraged Shabaneh to announce a press conference to be held on 22/2/2010 in which he would reveal more information on additional corruption among some top leaders of the PA. But he retreated and cancelled the press conference, claiming that President ‘Abbas viewed the move as “harmful to the interests of the Palestinian people,” and would instead read these documents by himself and order an investigation to go ahead in all corruption cases.<sup>72</sup>

‘Abbas also ordered the formation of a commission of inquiry to be led by Fatah Central Committee member Abu Mahir Ghunaym. Sitting on the committee will be other members of the Fatah Central Committee ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and Rafiq al-Natsheh. The Palestinian president instructed the commission of inquiry to submit its findings to him within three weeks.<sup>73</sup> On the completion of this investigation, ‘Abbas relieved the chief of his office Rafiq al-Husseini from his position.

In a letter that ‘Abbas addressed to al-Husseini, he said that the committee concluded that al-Husseini had made personal mistakes outside the remit of his job, which he should have avoided, but added that while relieving him from his position as chief of the president’s office in accordance with the recommendation of the investigation committee, ‘Abbas would like to assure al-Husseini that the former did not find in the committee’s report any indication that latter exploited his public position to acquire personal gains or extortions of any kind.<sup>74</sup>

‘Abbas also ordered the destruction of all videos and CDs used in this case, particularly those that show leading personalities of the PA and Fatah engaged in embarrassing sexual behavior, and he formed a special committee to supervise the actual and total destruction of the footage. However, the PA’s General Intelligence Service and PSS possess many scandalous and immoral images for some politically important Fatah leaders.<sup>75</sup> The crisis was handled without holding to account many of those involved in corruption cases.

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\*The symbol \$ used throughout this book is the US\$.





### *Fifth: The Factions and Palestinian Forces*

Fatah fully endorsed and forcefully defended the political path of the PLO and the PA, and was, in fact, its principal advocate. Though he successfully managed to rally the 2009 Sixth Congress of Fatah behind him, ‘Abbas faced some formidable challenges from within Fatah. Alongside the difficulties with PM Fayyad, the most significant threat to ‘Abbas was the attempt of Muhammad Dahlan to distort the image of the president within the PLO in preparation for his eventual assumption of its leadership.

Besides the difference between Fatah and Fayyad over the ministerial posts, Fatah experienced a crisis between ‘Abbas and Dahlan, a powerful member of its Central Committee and its spokesperson, Dahlan’s membership of the Central Committee was frozen pending investigation of a number of charges against him; namely incitement against the leadership of the PA and the PLO, corruption and infringement of the functions of the security forces. The Fatah Central Committee also suspended Dahlan’s supervision of Fatah’s office for Information and Culture, and appointed Nabil Abu Rudaina, member of the same office and Mahmud ‘Abbas spokesperson, to be the spokesperson of Fatah, instead.

According to some Palestinian sources, the primary reason for this tussle between the President and Dahlan were some recorded documents that show the latter in a barrage of criticism against ‘Abbas. He described the President as a weak man whose focus is the economic interests of his children, with no option left except to relinquish his position, as well as other inappropriate personal comments about ‘Abbas.<sup>76</sup>

The roots of these accusations go back to September 2010 when some of ‘Abbas’ aides accused Dahlan of inciting some Fatah leaders, particularly Nasir al-Qudwah, to maintain that they have better claim for assuming the leadership of the PA and to rule than ‘Abbas and the prime minister of his government Salam Fayyad. Besides, Dahlan was reportedly striving to consolidate his grip over the security forces and ministries, infuriating these aides, who held Dahlan directly responsible for the fall of GS in the hands of Hamas.<sup>77</sup>

According to Palestinian sources, some of Fatah’s dignitaries and security personnel associated with Dahlan guided the police to a large, secret arms store in Balata refugee camp, north of the WB, belonging to Dahlan and his associates, and uncovered many Kalashnikov assault rifles.<sup>78</sup>

This ‘Abbas-Dahlan rivalry was also related to the peace process, which had reached an impasse. According to some observers, Israel wanted to weaken Fatah, which has been leading the negotiations, from within, compelling it to return to the negotiations table on the usual unfair conditions set by Israel.

In this vein, the FRC agreed in November 2010 to form a general council of 451 members to act on behalf of the general congress of the movement. With this move, ‘Abbas aimed to consolidate his position within Fatah and outmaneuver Dahlan in the Central Committee. It was generally assumed within Fatah inner circles that the formation of this general council was an indication that no other congress of Fatah would be convened, meaning the Sixth Congress of August 2009 would be the last one, and that the recently constituted general council will be tantamount to the general congress on all matters.<sup>79</sup>

The president of Fatah faced another challenge that was, however, less dangerous to his authority, but reveals the weakness of the party. This was masterminded by the second-in-command in the movement, Faruq Qaddumi. The latter tried to convene an alternative organizational congress of Fatah outside Palestine, which, he maintained, aimed at “salvaging the movement.”<sup>80</sup> All indications suggest that this does not seem to have been a serious initiative, and was ultimately unsuccessful.

Although it was, by 2010, experienced in governance through ruling GS, Hamas insisted on a program of resistance. To this end, it undertook limited military operations against the Israeli occupation in the WB. Simultaneously, it tried to reconcile between resistance and the priorities required for ruling GS, which necessitated some security arrangements with Israel. Hence an undeclared, but a de facto truce with Israel had prevailed in the GS.

In response to Israeli attacks on the GS, other factions continued firing missiles at Israeli targets, though, on the whole, there was a favorable response to the request of the Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades to maintain a de facto truce with the occupation.

The leadership of Hamas made some diplomatic moves in the Arab and Muslim world to lift the blockade of GS. These moves played a role in encouraging some Muslim institutions in the West and Turkey to send a number of convoys which attempted to reduce the impact of the siege on the Gazans, and drew international attention to their plight. Thus, the siege issue transformed from a mere Palestinian and Arab concern into a Muslim and international public one.



Meanwhile, Hamas was unable to launch significant resistance operations against the Israel, except in Hebron and Ramallah. This was largely because of the close and sizeable security coordination between the PA's security forces, Israel and the US, coupled with lack of a strong Arab support for the resistance program and for the wish to loosen the security grip of the PA.

Meanwhile, the attempt to swap the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit for hundreds of Palestinian detainees in the Israeli prisons remained stagnant, with Israel refusing to release Palestinians who undertook military operations against it.

No significant changes had taken place during the year on the positions of the Palestinian factions and forces towards the two movements, Fatah and Hamas. Thus, no major change can be identified with regard the impact and effectiveness of the two movements in the Palestinian arena.

The PIJ managed to keep a distance between itself and Hamas regarding its position on the government, and on military operations in the GS. Relations between the two movements improved and become stronger than before in 2010. However, like Hamas, the PIJ suffered considerably in the WB because of the tremendous security pressure on the resistance.

In the same vein, some prominent independent personalities managed to form The National Committee for the Defense of the Inalienable Rights for the Palestinian People. Amongst those were Munir Shafiq, Bilal al-Hassan, Muhammad al-Rifa'i, Hilmi al-Bilbisi, Mu'in al-Tahir, Mirvat abu Khalil, Nafith Abu Hasnah, Majid al-Zeer, Muhammad abu Maizar and Salah al-Dabbagh. 'Azmi Bishara declared his support for this movement, but did not join it. Though non-military in nature, this organization declared its support for the resistance, and was in turn supported by resistance and military factions. It also declared that it does not claim to be an alternative to the PLO, but strives seriously and persistently to rebuild the PLO and its institutions on a democratic basis, based on elections. This was one of the most important steps, if not the most important step, towards the goal initiated since the Oslo Accords in activating a leading role for independent personalities in the Palestinian arena. Ultimately, the effectiveness of such an organization will depend on its ability to rally Palestinian and Arab public opinion to campaign on key Palestinian national concerns.<sup>81</sup>

## ***Sixth: Security Coordination***

There are wide, ongoing political and intellectual differences between Fatah and Hamas on security coordination, with the main aggravation caused by security coordination between the PA and the Israel.

Security coordination with Israel had led to continuous arrests among the supporters of the resistance. This state of affairs raised important questions on the viability or futility of agreements that fail to gain political progress on the ground, especially when the PA continues its campaign of arrests of Palestinian freedom fighters or the PA security coordination facilitates Israeli to arrest or assassination of these fighters.

The patronage of President Mahmud ‘Abbas to Palestinian-Israeli security coordination had increased the level of danger caused by its consequences. This danger also increased when Fayyad’s government oversaw the stationing in Ramallah of the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) for Israel and the PA, first Lieutenant General Keith Dayton and later General Michael Muller. Their mission was to coordinate and follow up operations against the resistance. This sharply accelerated the efficiency and effectiveness of Palestinian security forces in pursuing members of the resistance, forcing the abortion of many operations targeting Israel.

On 11/8/2010, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* mentioned that for the first time since the outbreak of the second *Intifadah* (uprising) in 2000, there is not a single security suspect being sought by Israel in the northern WB. In the southern WB, there are only a few names on the security establishment’s wanted list. The newspaper added that the situation was a reflection of both the improved security situation in the WB and the increasing cooperation between Israeli and PA security forces.<sup>82</sup> The director of the Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*), Yuval Diskin, commended that the PA security forces were perhaps at the strongest point it have been in 16 years, thanks primarily to assistance coming from the US and the international community. He added that these forces were demonstrating a great deal of “motivation” and “determination” in preventing attacks, including arresting hundreds of Hamas activists.<sup>83</sup>

Concerning security coordination operations, Israel revealed in a report, to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) in Brussels that Israeli security forces



undertook 2,968 instances of coordination in 2010 compared to 1,297 in 2009, a rise of 129%. In addition, 686 joint bilateral meetings were held between the PA and the Israeli security forces in 2010 compared to 544 in 2009, a rise of 26%. Palestinian security forces escorted 623 Israelis, who entered Area A of the WB by mistake. Even during the period of relative calm in 2010, 463 attacks by the Palestinian resistance occurred in or emanated from the WB.<sup>84</sup>

Another report published by the Information and Decision Support Center in the Palestinian Ministry of Planning in GS, revealed that PA security agencies had arrested 200 WB Hamas supporters in January 2011, and cited some three thousand politically motivated arrests for 2010. Out of those arrested, 1,404 were ex-detainees, 49 imams in mosques, 23 university professors, 36 journalists, 32 local councilmen, 417 university students and nine teachers.<sup>85</sup>

An earlier American report, prepared by journalist Nathan Thrall, titled “Our Man in Palestine” revealed that in 2009, Palestinian and Israeli forces took part in 1,297 coordinated activities, many of them against militant Palestinian groups, a 72% increase since 2008. Together they have largely disbanded the *al-Aqsa* Martyrs Brigades, a principal Fatah militia; attacked Islamic Jihad cells; and all but eliminated Hamas’s social institutions, financial arrangements, and military activities in the WB. According to the latest annual report of the Shabak, “continuous [counterterrorist] activity conducted by Israel and the Palestinian security apparatuses” reduced Palestinian attacks against Israelis in the WB and East Jerusalem to their lowest numbers since 2000.<sup>86</sup>

Mike Herzog, former chief of staff to Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said the current level of cooperation “is better than before the second intifada even—it’s excellent.” Muna Mansur, a Hamas legislator in the Palestinian Parliament and widow of an assassinated senior leader of the movement, told me: “The PA has succeeded more than the Israelis in crushing Hamas in the West Bank.”<sup>87</sup>

The US was instrumental in promoting and consolidating this role through sizeable financial assistance to the PA, and by spending generously on its own security coordinators in the WB. Since 2007, the State Department allocated \$392 million to the Dayton mission, with another \$150 million requested for 2011. At its headquarters in a 19th century stone building at the US consulate in West Jerusalem, the USSC has a 45-person core staff composed primarily of American and Canadian but also British and Turkish military officers.<sup>88</sup>

As a result of this coordination, Palestinian and Israeli security forces captured a number of prominent leaders of the resistance in the WB. However, some of the detainees released from the prisons of the PA were either rearrested by Israel or assassinated.

Security coordination was not limited to pursuing the resistance, but reached the extent of the PA continuing to turn a blind eye to the Israeli assault on the GS in 2008–2009. According to the 2010 Wikileaks release of diplomatic cables, the Israeli government of Ehud Olmert attempted to coordinate the war on GS with the PA.

According to *Haaretz* newspaper, a number of classified diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks revealed that in a June 2009 a meeting took place between Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak and a US congressional delegation. In this meeting, Barak claimed that the Israeli government “had consulted with Egypt and Fatah prior to Operation Cast Lead, asking if they were willing to assume control of Gaza once Israel defeated Hamas.” He added, “Not surprisingly,” Israel “received negative answers from both.” In the revealed document, Barak also expressed his feeling that “the Palestinian Authority is weak and lacks self-confidence, and that Gen. Dayton’s training helps bolster confidence.”<sup>89</sup>

### ***Seventh: The Resistance.. Pursuit and Achievement***

On 18/1/2009, when the Israeli aggression against GS ended, the Palestinian resistance resumed its attempts to smuggle weapons to the GS in preparation for an expected second Israeli attack. The resistance also tried to launch operations in the WB, some of which succeeded, but many failed because of the security coordination between the PA and Israel.

At the beginning of 2010, Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, revealed new missiles it used during Israel’s military operation in GS. On its website, Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades published pictures of the weapons it secretly smuggled to the Hamas-run GS despite an Israeli-led blockade on the coastal enclave. The photos showed the missiles were Tandem RPG-29 anti-armor missiles and 107mm rockets.<sup>90</sup>



The first successful violent resistance operation was on 10/2/2010, when a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli soldier near the Zatarra crossing south of Nablus. The Israeli army announced that the perpetrator was a PA police officer. PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad denounced the attack and said it “conflicts with our national interests.” He pledged to take steps to prevent such incidents in the future, while endorsing “peaceful resistance” against settlements and the security barrier.<sup>91</sup>

In an operation that targeted a police patrol near Otniel settlement south of Hebron in the WB, the resistance killed on 14/6/2010 an Israeli soldier and wounded two others. On 22/6/2010, the Israeli army, ISA and Israel Police arrested those they claimed were “responsible” for the June 14th attack, some of whom had been held by Israeli security forces in the past for their involvement with Hamas. The Israeli army said that those arrested “had planned additional attacks, most notably to abduct a soldier or civilian in the Gush Etzion area. The operatives had already begun scouting the area, and had purchased skull caps and a wig that they planned to use in the attack.”<sup>92</sup>

On 31/8/2010, four Israeli settlers were shot dead while driving on Route 60 when resistance fighters opened fire on their vehicle near Bnei Naim, east of Hebron.<sup>93</sup> Two other Israeli settlers were injured, on 1/8/2010, when resistance fighters opened fire on them while they were driving in the area of Rimonim Junction near the Kochav Hashachar village, east of Ramallah in the WB. Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades announced that they had carried out the Hebron and Ramallah operations.<sup>94</sup>

In spite of the obstacles, it can be seen that resistance operations never stopped, reflecting the lack of options other than to continue the struggle. Security coordination is and will likely continue to be a major factor preventing violent expression of resistance. However, with no serious political solution forthcoming, security cooperation is doomed to eventually end as it is rejected by the majority of the Palestinian people and by resistance factions. Security coordination with Israel constitutes one of the PA’s most unpopular tactics, justified as it is by the notion of accelerating the peace process and establishing a Palestinian state. In the mean time, the Israeli occupation is exploiting all such developments, prolonging their duration, in order to make the peace process continue, and to transform the PA into a Quisling security apparatus that crushes other national forces, specifically the resistance.

## *Conclusion*

During 2010, the Palestinian scene witnessed the continuation of political and geographical schism. The PA maintained security coordination with it to hunt down resistance movements in the WB. Israel, with no serious opposition from the PA, was able to continue its siege of the GS, and to exhibit more extremism and intransigence during negotiations. The American government chose not to oblige Israel to stop settlement building, which constituted the minimum Palestinian demand to restart negotiations.

Presidential and PLC elections may have reunited the Palestinians had not the reconciliation negotiations between the Palestinian factions stumbled in lieu of American-Israeli pressure. This pressure was also coupled with the opposition of some neighboring countries to the participation of Hamas in governance.

The government of PM Fayyad continued its efforts to build Palestinian institutions in preparation for the establishment of a state. Self-empowerment efforts focused on civil and peaceful aspects such as “peaceful resistance.” Inter-Palestinian reconciliation was neglected, and Fayyad’s government even fought against all other forms of resistance.

The schism also led to a tightening of the PA’s uncompromising approach to crushing Hamas under the pretext that it should not be allowed to repeat what it’s takeover in the GS. This reached the unprecedented level of the PA targeting all forms of religiosity, as well as Hamas’ civil and social institutions in the WB, which offered services to tens of thousands of Palestinians.

The conflicts within Fatah itself weakened the PA’s national project in the WB. Rather than focusing on the conflict with Israel, the political arena was preoccupied with the repercussions of internal conflicts. To increase the complexity of the problems, Israel involved itself in these conflicts, favor some figures at the expense of others. When the Palestinian president hoisted the card of resignation, differences developed with Muhammad Dahlan. He seemed willing and able to replace ‘Abbas, and to continue the negotiations with Israel, with an even lower level of Palestinian demands than those already offered.





There is a general consensus among Palestinians that the PLO constitutes the umbrella that unites them all; the ultimate reference for all key decisions on the path of the Palestinian issue. But its continuing dubious and defective legitimacy because of the expiry of the terms of office of its leadership and those of the PNC, and the conspicuous absence of representatives of popular resistance movements and the aborted Palestinian reconciliation deal had all contributed to crippling the Organization. Thus, it was not possible in 2010 to restructure the institutions of the PLO on new basis that equips it to resume its traditional role in leading the Palestinian struggle.

Palestinian steadfastness in the GS continues despite the suffocating siege and the inability of Gazans to rebuild what the Israelis destroyed during their 2008–2009 aggression. Gazans succeeded in rallying international popular, even official, support to their cause and against the siege, which is reflected in the convoys that visited GS from Europe and the Arab/ Muslim world. Meanwhile, the Palestinian government of Isma‘il Haniyyah remained preoccupied with attempts at lifting the blockade and to provide the salaries of its civil and military personnel; while the Palestinian factions decided, urged by Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, to maintain a de facto truce with Israel.

Haniyyah’s government launched a major campaign tackling enemy agents implanted by Israel during its invasion of the GS. On certain occasions, Hamas also responded to the arrest of some of its members in Ramallah by arresting Fatah leaders in GS and prohibiting them from engaging in political activities.

But activity was not limited to political wrangling, and a number of resistance operations were executed against Jewish settlers in Hebron and Ramallah. These events boosted the morale of the Palestinians, and demonstrated the enduring popularity of direct resistance, in spite of the best efforts to halt it by the PA in collaboration with Israel and the US.

Since the beginning of 2011, changes in the Arab world, have considerably affected the reconciliation agreement; Haniyyah inviting ‘Abbas to meet and the latter’s acceptance; Fatah’s acceptance of Hamas’ reservations and the resolving of the troublesome security issue. Consequently, 3/5/2011 was a turning point, as

both parties signed the reconciliation agreement. However, this agreement faces enormous challenges; mutual trust must be earned and those fomenting sedition and benefiting from schism must be firmly dealt with. Crucially, foreign interference particularly from Israel and the US, must be prevented.

Please note that the Palestinian Reconciliation agreement was signed during the finalizing and publishing of this report. Details of the agreement and its implications will be discussed and analyzed thoroughly in *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12*.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The Palestinian factions have signed the reconciliation agreement in Cairo on 3/5/2011, while the official ceremony took place on 4/5/2011. See Palestine News and Information Agency (Wafa), 3/5/2011, <http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=16036>; site of Al Jazeera, 4/5/2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/20115434236113769.html>; and *The Guardian* newspaper, London, 4/5/2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/04/palestinian-rivals-hamas-fatah-deal>
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## This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11 is the sixth in a series of annual resourceful scientific studies. The Report discusses the developments of the Palestinian issue of this period, in an objective and comprehensive manner. The meticulous analytical reading of events tries also to foresee the future. This Report has become a basic reference in Palestinian studies, it is a must read for all those concerned.

An outstanding team of 14 academics and experts contributed to this Report. It is divided into eight chapters, that cover the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Arab, Muslim and international stances toward the Palestinian issue. This Report focuses also on the issue of Jerusalem and the holy sites; whereas, the demographic and economic indicators are studied and analyzed in two separate chapters.

As a serious addition to Palestinian studies, those interested in this field, including specialists, experts, libraries of universities and research centers, should have their copies of this Report.

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