

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012 – 2013



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Chapter One

The Internal Palestinian Scene

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The Internal Palestinian Scene

Introduction

There were no serious developments in the internal Palestinian situation during 2012 and 2013. Despite consensus on the choice of prime minister being made in February 2012, he was not able to form a consensus government for the subsequent two years. Issues related to reconciliation remained in limbo overall, and serious interest declined in the efforts to put the Palestinian political house in order. Meanwhile, the efforts for a peaceful settlement continued at the expense of reconciliation and reform, and Palestinian division between the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS) grew deeper and more entrenched.

This chapter attempts to analyze the internal Palestinian situation during 2012 and 2013, and the performance of the governments in Ramallah and GS, as well as Palestinian reconciliation issues, relations among Palestinian factions, and the problem of security forces and their conduct at home.

First: The Emergency Government in the West Bank (WB)

Between 2012 and 2013, the emergency government in the WB headed by Salam Fayyad, and then Rami Hamdallah who succeeded him in 2013, continue to operate, while perpetuating the situation that emerged following the internal Palestinian division.

Palestinian resistance forces continued to accuse the emergency government of lack of constitutional legitimacy, since it did not seek to obtain a vote of confidence in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Meanwhile, the government suffered from a crippling financial crisis amid tough economic conditions, and lower receipts from foreign donors.

The past two years saw a limited crackdown on corruption in the Palestinian Authority (PA), which then held local elections in the WB in isolation from GS. The relationship between the two Palestinian administrations saw a lot of tension and mutual accusations.



Although the PA was able to obtain recognition as a non-member state of the United Nations (UN), increased Israeli Judaization and settlement activities, combined with the ongoing withdrawal of powers of PA sovereignty over the WB areas, made it increasingly weak and politically impotent.

The most important issues related to the emergency government can be addressed under the following themes:

1. The Worsening Financial Crisis and Economic Conditions

The financial crisis was the most important issue facing the emergency government in 2012 and 2013. In early 2012, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad called for urgent action to reduce the budget deficit, which stood at \$800 million* in 2011, and was expected to hit \$1.1 billion in the budget of 2012.¹

The fall in foreign financial support, as some donor countries reneged on their financial obligations, caused a severe financial and economic crisis for the PA, forcing it to take unpopular measures such as spending cuts and tax increases,² while calling on banks to loan the PA up to \$300 million.³ Despite these conditions, in mid-February 2012 Fayyad's government had to reduce the highest income tax bracket to 20%, after protests by civil society groups.⁴

Before the end of March 2012, Fayyad's government passed the 2012 budget, which contained a deficit of over \$1 billion.⁵

With the aggravation of the financial crisis in the summer of 2012, Fayyad conducted secret negotiations with Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz, and signed an agreement with him on revenues and the transfer of goods between the PA and Israel.⁶ Fayyad also sought advice from the governor of the Bank of Israel Stanley Fischer on how to overcome the financial crisis plaguing the PA.⁷ However, this was not translated into a breakthrough, in light of the difficult economic conditions, high unemployment, and the dire financial situation of the PA at the end of the year.⁸

With the beginning of 2013, the Fayyad government published data showing that the public debt of the PA was close to nine billion shekels (about \$2.4 billion), which went to show the depth of the financial crisis under which the PA in Ramallah was reeling.⁹

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

Before the end of March, Fayyad's government approved a \$3.8 billion budget for 2013, with a deficit that exceeded \$1 billion.¹⁰ This was inconsistent with Fayyad's plans to achieve economic prosperity. Ultimately, the heart of the problem is the occupation itself, not just the conduct of the PA and individuals in government.

Despite some emergency aid provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the United States of America (US), and some European Union (EU) countries to the tune of \$500 million in July and August,¹¹ the budget, according to Rami Hamdallah, the new head of the emergency government, still had a \$550 million deficit by the end of 2013.¹²

The financial crisis is expected to continue for the time being, in light of the PA's dependence on foreign aid, and the financial and economic agreements signed with Israel. This crisis reflects in various ways the injustice and inequality brought about by the Oslo Accords and other agreements related to them, which have imposed dependency on Israel and made the PA hostage to its policies.

2. Opening Corruption Cases

With the beginning of 2012, the Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC) continued to pursue corruption cases involving a number of ministers in the emergency government. The Minister of Economy Hassan Abu Lebda was referred to court on 10/2/2012,¹³ in addition to the Minister of Agriculture Ismail Daiq. The Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki was also referred to the PACC on 27/4/2012.¹⁴

Despite assurances by the head of the PACC Rafiq Natsheh, who said he was in contact with competent authorities abroad in order to extradite a number of individuals suspected of embezzlement and fraud to the tune of millions of dollars,¹⁵ the PACC was delayed, and in the end, it only took limited measures, confiscating funds and assets held by Muhammad Rashid and Walid Najjab.¹⁶

Aware of the extent of the PACC's shortcomings, Fatah lawmaker Najat Abu Bakr accused the Ministry of Finance in Ramallah of corruption through side deals with major companies, demanding President Mahmud 'Abbas open an investigation into these abuses.¹⁷

It was clear that the effort to deal with corruption remained inadequate and limited, and did not meet the expectations pinned on them. It is not expected that any serious change will take place during the next phase.



3. Cabinet Reshuffles

Despite repeated calls by Fatah to President ‘Abbas to sack and replace Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, ‘Abbas repeatedly reappointed Fayyad to head a cabinet with an amended lineup. ‘Abbas ordered a cabinet reshuffle under Fayyad, and the new government swore oath before ‘Abbas on 16/5/2012.¹⁸ Yet, with rising objections and criticisms by the Fatah leadership over Fayyad’s tenure, ‘Abbas accepted the latter’s resignation on 14/4/2013, and appointed Rami Hamdallah as his successor.¹⁹

But Hamdallah resigned 18 days after he was sworn in, on 7/6/2013, because of a sharp dispute with his two deputies (appointed by ‘Abbas) over powers. His resignation was accepted, but he continued to serve in a caretaker capacity, until the dispute was resolved. Hamdallah was re-appointed as prime minister, and was sworn in before ‘Abbas on 19/9/2013.²⁰

One of the reasons that led to Fayyad’s resignation was the undeclared conflict between him and ‘Abbas. Salam Fayyad tried to take advantage of his position, and his financial and administrative influence, to form a bloc of supporters. Fayyad benefited from US support or reassurance by his policies. ‘Abbas ultimately accepted his resignation after becoming increasingly concerned about him, taking advantage of calls from Fatah for Fayyad’s dismissal.

4. The Elections

On 11/7/2012, Fayyad’s government approved the holding of local council elections in 93 localities, which were conducted on 20/10/2012. The Central Elections Commission (CEC) approved the results, and the voter turnout was 55%.²¹

The results of the local elections seemed lackluster and half-hearted, after the resistance factions, led by Hamas, declared a boycott. This invalidated any true competition in the elections, as they were limited to electoral lists affiliated to Fatah, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and independents, which included Fatah members ostensibly expelled from the movement.

Hanna Nasir, chairman of CEC that oversaw the municipal elections, acknowledged there were violations following the closure of the polls, but stressed that this was of moderate scope, and pledged to address all violations.

Later, the CEC confirmed in a press conference that the complaints it received from monitoring groups did not affect the election results. The CEC therefore endorsed the results, noting that it had received a number of complaints that were dealt with first hand on election day.

The municipal elections highlighted the internal split within Fatah in many areas of the WB. Indeed, figures dismissed from Fatah ran on independent lists in some districts, defeating official Fatah candidates and lists. The most prominent example of this took place in the city of Nablus, where the Fatah electoral list was headed by Amin Maqboul, Secretary of the Fatah Revolutionary Council. Maqboul failed to defeat Ghassan al-Shak'a, who had been dismissed from Fatah. Al-Shak'a was then a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO.

Although Fatah declared that its lists had won by a landslide in the local elections, claiming that this represented a referendum over its political platform, observers said that the low turnout, Hamas's boycott, and the victory achieved by Fatah defectors against Fatah lists, were a blow to Fatah's leadership in the WB and were no reason to celebrate.

At the same time, Palestinian sources indicated that the elections in the WB reflected the hidden conflict between President Mahmud 'Abbas, leader of Fatah, and the former Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan, who was expelled from the movement on 11/6/2011. Dahlan, despite being outside the Palestinian territories, backed electoral lists that competed with official lists from Fatah led by 'Abbas, especially in the major cities in the WB, such as Ramallah, the seat of the PA.²²

On the other hand, Amin Maqboul acknowledged there were many mistakes made, and also recognized the presence of internal disputes during the electoral process, especially in Nablus, and with regard to Fatah's activities in the municipal elections in the WB. In remarks he made to the press, Maqboul acknowledged to a large extent responsibility for the loss, and expressed regret for accepting to run under the prevailing circumstances. Maqboul cited a number of reasons for Fatah's loss in Nablus, and the position of organizational frameworks before and during the electoral process. Maqboul admitted that what happened during the municipal elections confirmed that the Fatah movement had not learned from the lessons of the PLC elections in 2006, requiring a comprehensive review of the events. Maqboul also made references to the influence of Muhammad Dahlan over the lists in Nablus and elsewhere.²³



For its part, Hamas judged that these elections represented a furtherance of the division, and had nothing to do with national consensus. Hamas stressed that holding elections without the participation of the GS, and in the absence of national consensus, rendered them worthless and illegitimate. Hamas called on the PA in Ramallah to seek the reconciliation that the people wanted, unite the interior, and give priority to democracy in accordance with the interests of the people.²⁴

With the improvement of relations between Fatah and Hamas in late 2013 and early 2014, officials in Hamas and its government declared their willingness to hold local, trade union, and student elections in the GS, as a gesture of goodwill in the efforts for reconciliation. This meant that the issue of local elections would be strongly present on the agenda of national Palestinian work during the next phase.

With regards to legislative and presidential election, which are related to developments concerning internal Palestinian reconciliation, Hanna Nasir, chairman of CEC, announced on 11/4/2013 the end of the process of updating the voters' register in the WB and GS, declaring readiness for the implementation of any presidential decree to hold elections.²⁵

5. The Strained Relationship with GS

The relationship between the emergency government in the WB and Hamas-controlled GS was marred by tension over issues like electricity, fuel, all the way to conflict over attitudes and political agendas.

Fayyad linked the solution to the worsening electricity crisis in GS to the distribution company in GS covering costs and paying for the fuel.²⁶ As a result, the crisis was aggravated and economic and living conditions deteriorated in GS.

With the stoppage of Egyptian fuel supplies as a result of the demolition and closure of border tunnels between Egypt and GS, especially in the second half of 2013, the emergency government restated the same conditions, and even demanded a 50% tax on fuel as a condition for supplying GS with fuel in early November 2013. The caretaker government in GS, because of the severe impact of the financial crisis it was facing, rejected this.²⁷ GS was plunged into darkness as a result. The crisis was not resolved until Qatar paid the tax to the PA in Ramallah in early 2014.²⁸

In parallel, sharp political crises erupted at some junctures between the emergency government and the GS caretaker government run by Hamas. On

24/4/2012, Mahmud Habbash, minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs in the Fayyad government, launched a verbal attack on Hamas, accusing it of working to establish a state in GS, with the support of the Muslim Brothers (MB) movement.²⁹ On 26/8/2012, the PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki launched another attack on Hamas, refusing to participate in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Tehran if attended by Hamas Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah.³⁰ In the meantime, Fayyad made an appeal to Haniyyah to decline an invitation by Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad to attend the summit and overcome their differences.³¹

When the president of the International Union for Muslim Scholars (IUMS), Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, visited GS on 7/5/2013, Habbash criticized him, declaring that his visit was not welcomed and claiming that it only cemented internal divisions.³²

Nevertheless, the emergency government reiterated on more than one occasion its pledge to not suspend its financial obligations to the GS, in a reference to the salaries of employees, especially those affiliated to it and who had abstained from going to work.

The relationship between the emergency government and GS is expected to follow the same trend in the coming phase, and the chapter of tension will not be closed until division is ended and the Palestinian political system is reunited under the banner of a single administration in the WB and GS. However, it is important to point out the big difference between the reality of the WB and that of the GS. The former is under the control of the Israeli occupation, where it continues to build settlements and Judaize Jerusalem, as the PA in Ramallah continues down the path of negotiations. In the meantime, the GS has been turned into a fortress for military resistance, one that has fought two successful conflicts against Israel. This makes the task of replicating the WB political and security regime in GS something that carries strategic, security, and political risks to the continuation of armed resistance.

6. Statehood, Refugees, Prisoners and Settlements

At the beginning of 2012, it seemed clear that the efforts to build state institutions spearheaded by Fayyad had suffered a major setback. For the PA refrained from signing up for international organizations after being recognized as a non-member observer state at the UN, and also because of accelerated Israeli



settlement activities in Jerusalem and the WB to the rhythm of the deadlock in the negotiations with the occupation.

A statement made by Palestinian Civil Affairs Minister Hussein al-Sheikh in Fayyad's government, stressed the foregoing, accusing Israel of undercutting all the sovereign powers of the PA in the Palestinian territories.³³

This situation continued in 2013, evident in a statement made by Riyad al-Maliki on 1/5/2013. Al-Maliki pointed out that the PA had promised US Secretary of State John Kerry to suspend its efforts to join UN agencies.³⁴ This made the Fayyad-led administration frustrated, as the latter blamed the whole thing on the failure of the PA leadership from the beginning.³⁵

Accordingly, it is possible to say that the state-building project touted heavily in the political discourse of the PA throughout recent years ended up with a major setback and failure, and that the Palestinian situation was left in great need of rebuilding within its political system in order to formulate a new project for liberation.

With the frequent criticisms leveled at the PA, the government in Ramallah tried to show sympathy with the refugees, especially in the refugee camps (RCs) in Syria (notably the Yarmouk RC which was subjected to a crippling siege), in light of the huge suffering and extensive bloodshed of the Palestinians in Syria. On 6/3/2013, the Palestinian government announced it would be offering \$1 million each month to help Palestinian refugees in Syria.³⁶

With the end of November 2013, the head of the emergency government Rami Hamdallah visited Beirut to take part in the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and met with Lebanese leaders, stressing that the Palestinian RCs were under Lebanon's sovereignty.³⁷

Ongoing events indicate that the Palestinian RCs will continue to be hostage to the volatile situation in Syria and Lebanon, and part of the polarization there in the coming period.

The government in Ramallah appeared completely helpless in confronting the settlements spreading in Palestinian territories like wildfire. Hamdallah could do nothing more than make gestures, for example declaring 750 thousand olive trees would be planted to protect against settlement building at the end of October 2013.³⁸

It was not be difficult to anticipate further escalation of the crimes of the settlers during the next phase, in the absence of any kind of response to these crimes, and in light of Palestinian division and the failure of uniting around national resistance against the occupation, settlement building, and the Judaization of Jerusalem.

7. The Issue of ‘Arafat’s Death

The extent of the failure of the emergency government and the PA in addressing the issue surrounding the late leader Yasir ‘Arafat’s death was clear. Despite the forensic investigations revealed by Al Jazeera in July 2012, in a report that included the results of tests on ‘Arafat’s belongings and blood, hair, and urine samples by Swiss experts. This was in addition to the analysis of ‘Arafat’s remains and other belongings carried out again by Swiss experts, whose results were announced in November 2013. The tests clearly showed the presence of a high level of the radioactive element polonium, but the PA did not take any steps to reveal the truth and share it with the public.³⁹

On this basis, it was not surprising that some Palestinian figures and factions launched accusations against the PA of deliberately failing to uncover the mystery of the death of President ‘Arafat, including Hassan Khreisheh, second deputy speaker of the PLC, who accused influential leaders in the PA of involvement in the murder of ‘Arafat, in collusion with Israel.⁴⁰ Mahmud ‘Abbas and Muhammad Dahlan also exchanged accusations over responsibility for the killing of ‘Arafat.⁴¹ Therefore, many doubts remain as to whether the PA would accomplish anything regarding this issue during the next phase.

8. Foreign Relations

In the context of its foreign relations, it was interesting that official relations were fully restored between the PA and Kuwait. In September 2012, President ‘Abbas nominated Ambassador Rami Tahboub as ambassador of Palestine to Kuwait, after an estrangement that had endured for 22 years, following the historical rupture that occurred between the two parties.⁴²



Second: The Caretaker Government in the GS

The caretaker government in GS led by Isma‘il Haniyyah continued to function over the past two years, under a crippling blockade that has had harsh effects on all aspects of life in GS.

Economically, the government faced financial hardship that evolved into a crisis in the second half of 2013, amid tough economic conditions due to the siege and the destruction of the tunnels on the border with Egypt.

Politically, the government renewed its commitment to national principles and support for the resistance, and rejected negotiations and Kerry’s plan. The Hamas-led government made concerted efforts to lift the siege and rebuild GS, leading Haniyyah on a successful foreign tour that included several Arab and Islamic countries, and brought the Emir of Qatar to GS to inaugurate some major projects. However, relations with Egypt and Syria soured after Hamas left Syria, and the coup that deposed President Muhammad Morsi in Egypt.

At the Palestinian level, the relationship between Haniyyah’s government and the PA in Ramallah had many episodes of tension and mudslinging in the media, followed by gestures of goodwill to improve relations and preparation of the national climate for internal reconciliation.

Administratively, the government made one cabinet reshuffle in an attempt to improve the administrative performance of services provided to citizens.

At the security level, the government was able to overcome sensitive security challenges arising from the overthrow of President Morsi in neighboring Egypt.

The most important issues related to the caretaker government in GS can be outlined as follows:

1. The Financial Crisis and the Worsening Economic Situation

The financial crisis was an important part of the tenure of the GS caretaker government in 2012 and 2013. The 2012 budget passed by the PLC in GS at the end of March 2012, was worth a total of \$869 million, and had a deficit of 80%.⁴³ The 2013 budget, passed by the PLC at the end of December 2012 with a total of \$897 million, had a deficit of 73%.⁴⁴ Before 2013 ended, the PLC passed the 2014 budget, with total expenditures of \$784 million with a deficit of \$589 million, indicating the depth of the financial crisis affecting Haniyyah’s government.⁴⁵

To underscore the economic deterioration that faced Haniyyah's government, one may point to statements made by the Minister of National Economy 'Alaa al-Rafati in early 2011, when he confirmed that 1,400 tunnels on the border with Egypt did not meet the needs of Gazans for goods, prompting Haniyyah to propose establishing a free trade zone between GS and Egypt.⁴⁶

Despite paying to employees on time to the tune of 149 million shekels (around \$38.6 million) monthly, offering assistance to needy families, and cutting some taxes,⁴⁷ Haniyyah's government suffered throughout 2012 from clear difficulties in reviving the economic situation in GS as a result of the continuation of the blockade.

With the beginning of 2013, the economic situation became even worse, as the Egyptian army conducted a systematic campaign to close down border tunnels between Egypt and GS. The deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in Haniyyah's government estimated GS's monthly losses as a result of the blockade at \$250 million.⁴⁸ In early October 2013, Minister of National Economy 'Alaa al-Rafati confirmed that the losses resulting from the destruction of the tunnels by the Egyptian army, notably since July 2013, amounted to approximately \$460 million.⁴⁹ To make matters worse, GS was struck by a blizzard in mid-December 2013, causing losses of up to \$64 million according to preliminary estimates by the Ministry of Public Works and Housing in Haniyyah's government.⁵⁰

Thus, all indications point out that the financial crisis facing Haniyyah's government would continue, and economic conditions would continue to deteriorate over the next phase.

2. Rejecting Negotiations, and the Strategy of Resistance Against Occupation

The caretaker government maintained its political positions rejecting continued negotiations with the occupation, calling them "absurd" and asserting that they squander Palestinian rights and core principles. Haniyyah's position emerged clearly following the Arab initiative for land swaps with Israel, flatly rejecting the bid.⁵¹ In addition, Haniyyah rejected the resumption of negotiations following the efforts by US Secretary of State John Kerry at the end of July 2013, and all the outcomes and commitments resulting therefrom. It does not appear that Haniyyah's government intends to tone down its sharp criticisms of the negotiations in the coming period.



Haniyyah's government did not hesitate to show its support for Palestinian resistance, stressing that resistance never stopped and that it was in a stage of studying and planning, and that resistance and jihad remained the most prudent choice to liberate the land and restore rights.⁵² This was embodied in providing political, national, and legal cover for Palestinian resistance forces in their fight against the occupation, despite the inclination of Haniyyah's government toward de-escalation on the ground.

When Israel assassinated Ahmad Ja'bari, deputy commander of the Ezzedein al-Qassam Brigades, Haniyyah declared that his blood would not shed in vain.⁵³ Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ) decided to initiate a full-scale response over the following seven days after the assassination of Ja'bari. This was known as the eight-day war in November 2012. The first day was the Israeli assault, while the following seven days were a counter-attack by Hamas and the PIJ, firing rockets that reached as far as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Israel stepped up its threats and mobilized its reservists for a full-scale attack on GS, while responding with heavy bombardment. However, Israel was in a weaker defensive position, and called for an unconditional ceasefire throughout the conflict, while Hamas and the PIJ insisted on their conditions in return for a ceasefire. Ultimately, the Netanyahu government and the US Department of State accepted those conditions for a ceasefire, led by lifting the blockade of GS. This was declared by both Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas's Political Bureau, and Ramadan 'Abdullah, secretary-general of the PIJ, at a joint press conference on 21/11/2012. Haniyyah emphasized that this development was a major victory for the Palestinian people and their cause.⁵⁴

As part of its strategy to confront the occupation, the Ministry of Interior in Haniyyah's government launched on 12/3/2013 a campaign to combat collaboration with Israel, and opened the door for collaborators to receive amnesty for a period of two months, after which the campaign was declared a success.⁵⁵

On the anniversary of the "Devotion of the Free" prisoner exchange deal, Haniyyah declared that thousands of resistance fighters were training above and below ground to meet the enemy in combat.⁵⁶ This indicates the extent of the wager made by the Haniyyah's government on resistance during the next stage, in order to confront Israel and defend the Palestinian people and their national cause.

3. The Blockade Issue and Reconstruction

The hopes of Haniyyah's government in breaking the political and economic siege were revived in 2012, especially in light of the success of Haniyyah's foreign tour, which included major Arab states. Haniyyah seemed confident on 28/2/2012 when he declared "The blockade is now behind us."⁵⁷ However, his enthusiasm was soon dampened as the blockade was sustained. On 2/4/2012, he proclaimed that the Arab countries were not innocent of the slow murder of the people of GS.⁵⁸ With the continuation of the blockade, despite the victory of Muhammad Morsi, the MB movement presidential candidate in Egypt's 2012 elections, Haniyyah declared on 29/8/2012 without equivocation that the PA was responsible for incitement toward sustaining the siege on GS.⁵⁹

The hurdles faced by the Palestinians in passing through the Rafah border crossing, with limited number of operating hours and long lists of people banned from travelling, were one of the leading manifestations of the blockade on GS. This prompted Haniyyah to put pressure on Egypt to repudiate the agreements relating to the Rafah crossing signed in 2005, arguing that these had legally expired, and called for opening the terminal to goods and people without restrictions.⁶⁰ Although President Morsi asked competent authorities repeatedly to ease the procedures at the Rafah crossing, the commitment was selective and partial, given the presence of many state agencies that were hostile to Morsi and the MB movement.

The year 2013 was the hardest at the level of the impact of the blockade on the people of GS. The campaign led by the Egyptian army against border tunnels, to close them down or demolish them, had deeply damaging economic effects on the living conditions of citizens in GS. This much was expressed in statements by 'Abdul Salam Siyam, secretary general of Haniyyah's government on 10/11/2013, who said that the GS was experiencing the most severe episode of the blockade.⁶¹

The crisis of fuel and electricity was one of the worst aspects of the blockade in 2012 and 2013. The Palestinian Energy and National Resources Authority in GS declared several times that the main power plant would close down due to lack of fuel, putting immense pressure on Haniyyah's government, which sought to find radical solutions for the crisis regionally.

Despite the agreement Haniyyah reached on 23/2/2012 with Egypt and the Islamic Development Bank to end the crisis, he returned on 2/3/2012 to accusing parties and forces of obstructing the resolution of the crisis for extortion purposes.⁶²



With Qatar's willingness to supply the GS with fuel to resolve the crisis, Haniyyah's government enjoyed a renewed sense of optimism.⁶³ However, the Hamas government soon accused the Egyptian authorities again of blocking the entry of the fuel supplies, and thus the crisis continued.

The electricity crisis continued with ups and downs, until it reached a peak when the power plant was shut down completely on 1/9/2013, due to fuel shortages resulting from the demolition of border tunnels, and taxes imposed by the government in Ramallah. Efforts were again made to find a solution, but they collided with the position of the PA, which refused to supply fuel to GS unless it paid tax on the fuel. Qatar intervened and paid the tax, easing the crisis to a certain degree.⁶⁴

All indications suggest that the blockade is going to get worse unless the conduct of the Egyptian government changes, and Palestinian reconciliation materializes.

Qatar sponsored several projects for the reconstruction of GS. Haniyyah declared that Qatar had allocated \$250 million for that purpose during his landmark visit to Doha in early 2012.⁶⁵ On 23/10/2012, the Emir of Qatar conducted a historical visit to GS, announcing massive projects worth more than \$400 million, which Haniyyah saw as a challenge to the political and economic blockade of GS.⁶⁶

On 13/12/2012, Haniyyah announced the start of the Qatari project for the reconstruction of GS.⁶⁷ However, the coup that took place in Egypt on 3/7/2013 prevented the entry of construction materials and other supplies needed for the project, which had to proceed partially and not fully according to the plans in place.

Accordingly, implementation of GS's reconstruction will remain partial unless coupled with an end to the blockade of GS.

4. The Relationship with the PA and Fatah

The years 2012 and 2013 saw many twists and turns in the relationship between Haniyyah's government on the one hand, and the PA and Fatah on the other. In addition to the usual factional bickering and the political disputes with responses and counter responses, this relationship saw some marked tension, especially when the Hamas Ministry of Interior announced at the end of February 2012 its intention to execute some collaborators affiliated with Fatah. This forced the ministry to deny its intention to carry out any executions on political or factional grounds.⁶⁸

The relation between the two sides entered a critical stage when Haniyyah's government accused Fatah and PA media outlets and figures, as well as the prominent but sacked Fatah figure Muhammad Dahlan, of incitement against GS. Hamas took legal action against them following the coup in Egypt, stressing that it had phone records proving the charges.⁶⁹

Despite the reactivation of reconciliation efforts at the end of 2013, the relationship between Fatah and Hamas remained hostage to differences and incitements from time to time. This will keep the future of the relationship subject to developments related to the progress of the reconciliation and national consensus.

In 2012 and 2013, Haniyyah's government constantly sought to encourage the formation of a Palestinian national unity government, declaring its backing for the Doha Declaration and its willingness to step down immediately upon the formation of this government. The reconciliation issue was an essential part of Haniyyah's political efforts, especially with Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi, after he took office, and Egyptian intelligence officials who were in charge of the Palestinian reconciliation issue.⁷⁰

Over the two years, Haniyyah's government made several goodwill gestures in this direction, including agreeing to let 80 people from Fatah return to GS, and pardoning detainees arrested during the clashes with Fatah in 2007.⁷¹ However, the last quarter of 2013 saw significant action, when Haniyyah called on the factions to participate in ruling the GS, called for forming a national committee to implement reconciliation, and reached out to President 'Abbas repeatedly, creating a fertile ground for achieving reconciliation.

5. Foreign Relations

In early 2012, Haniyyah continued his foreign tour, which had started with Egypt and Sudan. Haniyyah travelled to Turkey and Tunisia, and then Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iran. He met with the heads of states of these countries and senior officials, to discuss ways to support the Palestinian issue, to lift the blockade and reconstruct GS.

Haniyyah's tour yielded notable successes. For instance, Turkey agreed to prepare a comprehensive development plan for GS. Qatar also agreed to provide generous financial support through major development projects. There were other



important achievements from the tour.⁷² Interestingly, Haniyyah accused President ‘Abbas of pressuring certain Arab countries to refuse to receive him during his overseas trip.⁷³

Despite the good relationship Haniyyah’s government had with the Egyptian administration in 2012 and until the army overthrew President Morsi in early July 2013, Haniyyah’s government remained on the defensive most of the time, amid sharp attacks waged by Egyptian media outlets against the Palestinian group.

In response to accusations by the Egyptian media that Hamas was intervening militarily in Egypt and fabricating the fuel crisis in GS in the first half of 2012, Haniyyah announced that Hamas never intervened in Egypt’s internal affairs, either before or after the revolution, and expressed his government’s readiness to cooperate with Egypt to protect common security interests.⁷⁴

There was a marked improvement in the relationship between the two sides following a meeting between Haniyyah and President Morsi, after the latter was sworn in. This culminated in Egyptian promises to provide facilitations to GS regarding the Rafah crossing and the electricity and fuel crisis.⁷⁵

Haniyyah soon called for the formation of a joint security committee with Egypt following the killing of Egyptian soldiers in Sinai in early August 2012, denying that GS had any part in the attack, and stressing that the scenario of the crime confirmed Israel’s involvement.⁷⁶

In 2013, Haniyyah’s government had to deal with an even fiercer campaign in the Egyptian media. Many accusations were leveled at Hamas, which was even accused of staging bombings in Sinai and the Egyptian interior, especially after the military coup.

In response, Haniyyah’s government denied categorically any interference in Egyptian affairs, but also rejected the demonization of the Palestinian resistance, and emphasized that Hamas would not slide into side battles with Egypt under any circumstances.⁷⁷

Although Haniyyah’s government stressed that full rupture is not on the table when it came to the relationship with Egypt, it did not stop demanding that Egypt reopen the Rafah crossing to both goods and passengers, as an alternative to the tunnels that the Egyptian army proceeded to demolish.⁷⁸

There is nothing on the horizon to suggest that relations between the Hamas government and the Egyptian government will improve, at least as long as Egypt maintains its policy of sustaining the blockade of GS, and its hostility to the Hamas-led government.

Haniyyah's government maintained its consistent position towards the Syrian crisis, meanwhile, based on calling to an end to the injustice, murder, and bloodshed there in the framework of a political solution away from security solutions. Haniyyah's government also repeatedly denied the presence of any Hamas-affiliated combatants in Syria.⁷⁹

6. The Administrative Situation

Haniyyah's government tried to perform better in 2012 and 2013, in light of the blockade. In September 2012, the government passed a three-year plan to improve government performance.⁸⁰ There were traditional questions addressed to ministers and officials in the Haniyyah government in 2012 and 2013, but the most prominent of these were addressed by the PLC in GS to the Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Hamas's strongman, who was reprimanded for his repeated flouting of the law.⁸¹

Haniyyah made one ministerial amendment in 2012 and 2013, and the PLC in GS granted the reshuffled government a vote of confidence on 2/9/2012.⁸² At the first meeting of the new government, where broad powers were given to deputy Prime Minister Ziad al-Zaza, Haniyyah pledged to substantially improve the quality of his government's work within 100 days.⁸³

7. The Security Challenge

In 2012 and 2013, Haniyyah's government did not face any substantial security challenges internally, with the exception of a call by online and social media activists, calling themselves the Tamarrud (Rebellion) movement, to depose Haniyyah's government on 11/11/2013.

In this context, Haniyyah asserted that "toppling Gaza" was delusional,⁸⁴ as the GS Ministry of Interior uncovered a scheme involving the PA, Israel, and the intelligence services of an Arab country to destabilize the Strip, and confirmed the existence of flagrant roles and financing by Arab parties for plans to sabotage the security of the GS.⁸⁵ The security forces affiliated to the Haniyyah government were able to impose order and stability, and prevent any attempts to inject chaos or recreate the lawlessness that prevailed before Hamas's takeover of GS.



8. Prisoners, Jerusalem and Refugees

Haniyyah's government focused on affirming and enshrining Palestinian core principles, especially in relation to Jerusalem, refugees, and the detainees held by Israel. On 27/2/2012, during a meeting with Maher al-Taher of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) during his visit to the GS, Haniyyah stressed the commitment to the right of return.⁸⁶ He also warned against compromising the right of return,⁸⁷ calling on Palestinian leaders abroad to visit GS.⁸⁸

In the midst of the Yarmouk RC crisis, Haniyyah stressed that his government was making great efforts to end the siege on the camp and affirm the neutrality of the Palestinians in the Syrian conflict. During a ceremony, Haniyyah announced each Palestinian family fleeing from Syria would receive an apartment and a job, refusing naturalizing them.⁸⁹

Regarding Jerusalem, Haniyyah made repeated calls to the Arabs and Muslims to protect the city from strangulation and Judaization.⁹⁰ And concerning the issue of the detainees, Haniyyah announced his government was shouldering its responsibilities toward them, calling for a third *Intifadah* (uprising) to secure their release. Haniyyah also called on Egypt to put pressure on Israel to fulfill its commitments and agreements regarding improving the conditions of their detention.⁹¹

Third: Reconciliation and National Dialogue

The issue of Palestinian reconciliation in 2012 and 2013 saw many developments on the theoretical level. However, the two sides of the Palestinian divide did not succeed in translating these into concrete steps on the ground. The Doha Declaration, which was concluded in early 2012, remained ink on paper. Bilateral talks that took place with Egyptian sponsorship until the coup in Egypt did not succeed in putting the Declaration into practice, with mutual accusations over disrupting reconciliation. However, the end of the year 2013 saw some positive developments and initiatives to support reconciliation, especially by Haniyyah's government. The Doha Declaration was one of the most important milestones in the Palestinian reconciliation process and national dialogue. No sooner had the first month of 2012 ended than an important development took place in the dialogue

of Fatah and Hamas, when Khalid Mish'al and President 'Abbas signed the Doha Declaration, which was sponsored directly by the Emir of Qatar on 6/2/2012.

The Declaration called for the formation of a Palestinian National Reconciliation Government of independent technocrats headed by President 'Abbas; the continuation of the steps of activating and developing the PLO through the reformation of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) simultaneously with the presidential and legislative elections; continuation of the works of the committees that were formed, namely the General Freedoms Committee and the Community Reconciliation Committee. After that, the Declaration calls for the implementation of what was agreed upon in Cairo to begin the work of the CEC, paving the way for President 'Abbas to set a date for presidential and PLC elections, as well as PNC elections.⁹² The Doha Declaration ended months of debating between the two movements over the name of the consensus prime minister who would lead the government entrusted with implementing reconciliation and holding elections.

The ink on the Declaration had barely dried when disputes emerged between Mish'al and 'Abbas over Hamas's position on the agreement. Some Hamas leaders sprung to express their opposition to charging 'Abbas with heading the national reconciliation government, including member of the Political Bureau Mahmud al-Zahhar, who publicly rejected the agreement, and Khalil al-Hayyeh, who presented his opposition from a legal standpoint.⁹³

The opposition of the Hamas Change and Reform parliamentary bloc in the PLC was another obstacle to the agreement. Isma'il al-Ashqar, deputy head of the bloc, said that the Doha Declaration was against the law and that it bypassed the PLC.⁹⁴ Ahmad Bahr, acting speaker of the PLC, joined the internal opposition within Hamas. Bahr said that the appointment of 'Abbas as per the Doha Declaration violated the Palestinian Basic Law, declaring his rejection of the concentration of powers in the hands of one man.⁹⁵

Based on the objections made by Hamas leaders in GS, who were upset for not having been consulted before the agreement was signed, Mish'al had an urgent meeting with Haniyyah on 15/2/2012 in Doha to address the situation. The two men agreed and ended differences within Hamas over the implementation of the Doha Declaration.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the Doha Declaration was not put into practice because Fatah and Hamas differed over how it should be implemented, each party according to its



own rationale. This prompted the gathering of independent personalities headed by businessman Yasir al-Wadiah to propose an urgent initiative on 28/4/2012 to implement reconciliation between the two parties.⁹⁷

With the failure of the implementation in its first phase, Fatah and Hamas entered into a new stage from May 2012 until the end of the year. On 20/5/2012, two delegations representing Fatah and Hamas chaired by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and Musa Abu Marzuq met in Cairo under Egyptian auspices, and agreed to establish CEC in GS and begin consultations to form a government.⁹⁸ In another meeting, on 28–29/5/2012, the two sides resolved the outstanding issues related to forming a national reconciliation government,⁹⁹ paving the way for a third meeting on 5/6/2012. In this meeting, the two movements agreed to expedite the process of naming the members of the reconciliation government and announced it officially on 20/6/2012, in the presence of Mish‘al and ‘Abbas.¹⁰⁰

But none of this materialized. On 25/6/2012, Musa Abu Marzuq said an American veto was disrupting the process of Palestinian reconciliation,¹⁰¹ but ‘Azzam al-Ahmad denied there was any American veto on reconciliation.¹⁰²

Accordingly, tension between the two sides returned. On 2/7/2012, Hamas suspended voter registration in GS, because of security crackdowns in the WB.¹⁰³ Hamas also rejected a decision by the Fayyad government on 10/7/2012 to hold local elections in the WB, something that Hamas said undermined reconciliation efforts.¹⁰⁴

For its part, al-Ahmad stressed on behalf of Fatah that there would be no return to reconciliation talks with Hamas except after the CEC resumed its work in GS.¹⁰⁵ This was denied by Hamas through Haniyyah, who pointed out that the US had asked the PA to suspend reconciliation talks.¹⁰⁶

In an interview with the press on 20/9/2012, al-Ahmad reiterated Fatah’s unwillingness to start any new dialogue with Hamas, saying what was required was to begin implementing the reconciliation agreement immediately, and allow the CEC in GS to resume its work.¹⁰⁷

By the end of October 2012, Hamas leader Salah al-Bardawil said that his movement had presented Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi a new paper including mechanisms for implementing the stalled reconciliation with Fatah. Al-Ahmad’s response was to state that Egypt, after the MB movement took power

there, was no longer qualified to be a reference point and a sponsor for Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation, accusing the administration there of bias for Hamas.¹⁰⁸

On 7/12/2012, Mish'al made a historical visit to GS, his first in decades, where he promised to achieve reconciliation and end division.¹⁰⁹

On 17/1/2013, delegations from Fatah and Hamas, sponsored by Egypt, met in Cairo, and agreed to a timetable for the formation of a consensus government, headed by President 'Abbas, by the end of January 2013. An understanding was reached to accomplish reconciliation issues as one package. On 9/2/2013, a meeting of the PLO leadership framework convened. The framework would oversee and approve a new electoral law for the PNC, in addition to forming a CEC in the WB and GS to complete voter registration, providing that a consultation for forming a government begin at the end of February. After that, a presidential decree should be issued; setting the date for presidential, PLC, and PNC elections.¹¹⁰

The first fruits of this agreement begin to emerge with a meeting held between Hanna Nasir, chairman of CEC, and Isma'il Haniyyah, on 30/1/2013, followed by agreement on the start of the CEC's work in the GS.¹¹¹

But the march of reconciliation soon fell into disrepair, with no new developments after that save for the solitary meeting held by the PLO framework leadership on 9/2/2013, that produced no substantial results or procedures.

In a post on his Facebook page on 6/5/2013, Abu Marzuq attributed the delay in the implementation of reconciliation to six main reasons, including the absence of political issues on the dialogue agenda, the difference in political programs, Israeli and American vetoes, the Quartet conditions, Fatah's fear of Hamas dominating the PLO, and Abu Mazen's preference of negotiations with Israel over alternative approaches.¹¹²

In May 2013, reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas entered a phase of crisis management, in that it focused on formalities without any concrete results until the last month of 2013. In a new meeting held with Egyptian brokerage, Hamas and Fatah agreed on forming a reconciliation government within three months.¹¹³ On 30/5/2013, the General Freedoms Committee formed following the reconciliation agreement endorsed, at a meeting attended by Fatah and Hamas in Cairo, a pledge by all Palestinian factions to protect public freedoms and stop all forms of politically motivated detentions.¹¹⁴



In response to Haniyyah's call for the factions to participate in running GS, made on 26/8/2013, Fatah rejected the initiative, demanding to send a delegate to GS to check on Hamas's implementation of the Cairo Agreement and the Doha Declaration.

When Haniyyah delivered a key political speech on 19/10/2013, calling on Fatah to implement the reconciliation and end the division, Fatah responded through its spokesperson Ahmad 'Assaf, saying that Fatah was willing to implement the reconciliation, but that it was Hamas that was avoiding doing the same.¹¹⁵

The Fatah spokesperson in GS, Hassan Ahmad, stressed the serious intentions of his movement to end the division. Meanwhile, Sufian Abu Zaida, member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council, highlighted the positive aspects of Haniyyah's speech, and called on President 'Abbas to visit GS to turn the page on the division. In turn, Abu Marzuq denied (on 7/11/2013) Hamas's responsibility for disrupting the reconciliation, pointing at another occasion, on 23/11/2013, that the issue of reconciliation with Fatah was on hold until the expiration of what he called the "false pregnancy," in reference to the negotiations with Israel.¹¹⁶ On 28/11/2013, Haniyyah said in a meeting with political, community, and academic figures that his government and Hamas were committed to the Cairo and Doha Agreements, calling for the implementation of the reconciliation.¹¹⁷

As 2013 was nearing its end, positive developments related to Palestinian reconciliation took place. On 11/12/2013, Haniyyah contacted President 'Abbas, to discuss the humanitarian situation in GS and ways to achieve reconciliation between the two sides. 'Abbas also received a similar call from Mish'al on 14/12/2013 and discussed a number of issues with him, including ways to implement the reconciliation, and the steps required to activate it during the next phase.¹¹⁸

There was a climate of optimism when the Haniyyah government released a number of Fatah-affiliated detainees, and allowed members of parliament (MPs) and leaders who had fled during the clashes in 2007 to return to GS. Subsequently, there were accelerated movements in January 2014 involving the two sides. According to well-informed sources, the two parties discussed all issues related to the reconciliation away from the media, in order to form a national reconciliation government. However, the stalling of the reconciliation remains a strong possibility, despite the fact that all Palestinian sides have stressed its importance and necessity. The reconciliation agreement signed on 4/5/2011

did not address the real roots of the division, namely the political and strategic causes related to the two sides' disparate positions on the Palestinian national choice of armed resistance and its consequences, or the peace process and its consequences. These are diametrically opposed choices and secondary measures are insufficient to address them. Furthermore, the method of implementing the program of reconciliation puts the Israeli (anti-reconciliation) side in control of three out of five axes of the reconciliation: formation of the government, elections and the reform of security forces. These are all issues that Israel can disrupt, and it is impossible to implement related agreements without its consent or silence, especially in the WB.

Fourth: Internal Palestinian Relations

Internal Palestinian situations underwent many fluctuations and different stages over the past two years. At a time when Hamas overcame the crisis of internal disputes following the signing of the Doha Declaration, internal problems clearly left their mark on the organizational structure of Fatah.

Relations between Hamas on the one hand, and Fatah and the PA on the other, were often marked by tension and clashes in the media, while the relationship between Hamas and the PIJ improved significantly. The nature and path of internal Palestinian relations, at the level of the PA and the factions, can be detailed as follows:

1. Hamas's Internal Situation

The internal situation within Hamas in 2012 and 2013 witnessed many significant organizational developments. An organizational dispute took place between the leadership in GS and the leadership outside Palestine, following the Doha Declaration signed by Fatah and Hamas in February 2012. This much was clear through the statements opposed to the agreement made by a number of senior Hamas leaders, including Mahmud al-Zahhar, who said that handing things over to President 'Abbas as per the Doha Declaration was a misstep that no one had consulted him and his colleagues over.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Khalil al-Hayyeh rejected the idea of 'Abbas taking the post of prime minister unless the law was amended and he was sworn in before the PLC.¹²⁰



However, Hamas was able to overcome this juncture in a short time. On 15/2/2012, Salah al-Bardawil, Hamas leader in GS, made a statement stressing that the disparity in views of Hamas leaders had been resolved in favor of implementing the Doha Declaration.¹²¹

In 2012, there were internal elections within Hamas. According to Abu Marzuq, the elections expressed a marked change, with some Hamas cadres becoming members of its leading bodies and Political Bureau.¹²²

In early 2012, Mish'al announced that he would not be standing for the elections to be the head of Hamas Political Bureau, and added that he was leaving the official post but not his national role.¹²³

As a result of political, security, and technical conditions in the scene abroad, the election process was delayed there, as well as in the WB. On 2/4/2013, Hamas announced in an official statement that the Shura Council of the movement had renewed its vote of confidence in Mish'al as head of the Political Bureau for a new term, contradicting earlier expectations that he would not be in the race.¹²⁴ Mish'al, since he declared he would not be a candidate, had come under extensive pressure from many Hamas leaders and cadres to reconsider his position. The pressures continued when the Shura Council was convened, as Mish'al reiterated his desire not to run, but he was asked to leave it to the Shura Council to decide. When Mish'al deferred to this request, the Shura Council elected him head of the movement, and Haniyyah as his deputy.

Hamas witnessed a stable organizational atmosphere after the elections, allowing it to focus its efforts on the urgent national task at hand in the following stage.

2. Fatah's Internal Situation

The internal situation in Fatah in 2012 and 2013 was marked by internal disputes among wings and factions within the movement. The differences were mainly between President 'Abbas's faction and the faction of Muhammad Dahlan, the expelled Fatah leader. Dahlan's supporters launched scathing attacks on 'Abbas; on 9/1/2012, Samir al-Mashharawi said that ever since 'Abbas had become president of Fatah and the PA, a string of defeats had ensued.¹²⁵ In turn, on 11/1/2012, Member Parliament (MP) Majid Abu Shammaleh outlined 'Abbas's violations of the law since he became president.¹²⁶ On 29/1/2012, Fatah expelled

al-Mashharawi from the Revolutionary Council of the movement, because of his attack on ‘Abbas.¹²⁷ As a result, Dahlan lodged a complaint against ‘Abbas before the heads of blocs and lists of the PLC, on 31/1/2012.¹²⁸

Dahlan (backed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) benefiting from his close ties to the Egyptian regime following the coup against Morsi, and his broad influence within Fatah) continued his attacks on ‘Abbas at different times. On 7/11/2012, Dahlan asserted that ‘Abbas was finished, saying that his insistence on negotiations was a disaster, and accusing him of waiving the right of return in the second Camp David Summit.¹²⁹ On 7/10/2013, Fatah’s Central Committee expelled the former head of Palestinian National Security in Lebanon Brig. Gen. Mahmud ‘Issa, nicknamed “Lino,” who is affiliated to Dahlan, and stripped him of his military rank because of his excesses and repeated criticisms of the movement’s leadership.¹³⁰ In light of the failure of efforts made by regional parties to resolve the dispute between ‘Abbas and Dahlan, Fatah accused the latter on 29/10/2013 of assassinating Fatah cadres and surrendering GS to Hamas.¹³¹ Mutual accusations reached a peak between the two sides in early March 2014, as they blamed one another for the assassination of ‘Arafat.

Internal criticisms were not only made by the Dahlan faction. On 31/10/2012, ‘Abbas Zaki, member of Fatah Central Committee, accused the current Fatah leadership of being unqualified to represent the aspirations of the Palestinian people.¹³²

At Fatah’s internal level in GS, on 22/4/2012, the movement chose Yazid al-Huwayhi as head of its new leading body in GS.¹³³ This drew criticism at some levels within Fatah, including MP Ashraf Jum‘ah, who stressed that the organizational policy in place would lead to a split in the ranks of the organization.¹³⁴ However, it was not long before al-Huwayhi submitted his resignation as a result of internal disputes.¹³⁵ On 8/1/2013, ‘Abbas re-formed the leading body of Fatah in GS, appointing Ahmad Nasr as secretary.¹³⁶ On 5/3/2013, he formed a new leadership body for Fatah in GS.¹³⁷

On 6/11/2013, Mahmud al-‘Aloul, member of the Fatah Central Committee, announced that Fatah was trying to persuade Marwan Barghouti to accept the post of vice president of the PA.¹³⁸



3. Hamas and the PA

In addition to political disharmony, with the PA adopting and sponsoring the negotiations project, the relationship between Hamas and the PA in 2012 and 2013 was marked by tension and confrontation. In early 2012, Hamas published a report accusing the PA's security forces of detaining 805 of its supporters in 2011 alone.¹³⁹

On 23/3/2012, Khalil al-Hayyeh, Hamas leader, disclosed documents accusing the PA of involvement in a plot against GS and of causing the fuel and electricity crisis.¹⁴⁰ On 16/10/2012, PA security forces seized Hamas's military archives in the WB.¹⁴¹

When Hamas revealed documents showing the involvement of the PA and its embassy in Cairo in smearing the resistance and GS, the embassy responded by claiming Hamas's documents were forgeries¹⁴² before Ambassador Barakat al-Farra launched an attack on Hamas, claiming that 95% of the people of GS did not accept its rule, that they are powerless, and declared that the Rafah crossing would remain closed until the return of the presidential guard to their posts there.¹⁴³

In early 2013, Hamas published a statement in which it accused the PA security forces of assaulting 1,262 of its supporters in the WB during 2012.¹⁴⁴ It also accused, in a lengthy report, the PA security forces of attacking 1,613 of its members in the WB in 2013. Hamas put the number of detentions against its supporters at 782 and summons at 537, compared to 426 in 2012. Detention extensions in the prisons of the PA numbered 101 and assaults 188, including raids against homes, torture, physical assault, and assaults on private properties.¹⁴⁵ On 25/3/2013, Hamas accused members of the PA of relaying incorrect information regarding the massacre of Egyptian soldiers in Rafah,¹⁴⁶ and accused the PA on 13/6/2013 of waging a systematic campaign in the media against Hamas.¹⁴⁷

Over the second half of 2013, Hamas was busy denying accusations by President 'Abbas and the leaders in the PA of meddling in the internal affairs of Egypt, and sending cadres to Egypt to influence the course of events there.

Despite this, there were some exceptions that were able to buck the trend in the relationship between the two sides. On 30/11/2012, Hamas welcomed the decision of the UN General Assembly to recognize Palestine (here means the WB and GS) as a non-member observer state.¹⁴⁸ Another event of note was when the PA allowed Hamas on 13/12/2012 to commemorate its 25th anniversary in Nablus, for the first

time since 2007.¹⁴⁹ But it is difficult to imagine a major shift would take place in the relationship of the two sides without implementing the national reconciliation, which would have the effect of organizing and managing differences, and limit tensions to a minimum.

4. Hamas and Fatah

The trend governing the relationship between Fatah and Hamas fluctuated according to the progress of the dialogues taking place between the two sides. There was relative de-escalation between the two movements in the first quarter of 2012, before new tensions emerged pushing Hamas (on 1/4/2012) to launch an initiative for confidence building with Fatah.¹⁵⁰ Volatility in the relationship remained the norm leading up to the visit by the Emir of Qatar to GS, which was criticized by Fatah, as Fatah claimed it could be exploited to deepen the division.¹⁵¹

By the end of 2012, there was clear improvement in the relationship, when Hamas allowed Fatah to hold celebrations on the anniversary of its inception for the first time in six years.¹⁵²

Following the coup against President Muhammad Morsi in early July 2013, Hamas accused the leadership of Fatah of promoting lies in the Egyptian media about Hamas, and published 16 documents on 30/7/2013 highlighting the incitement against it by Fatah in the Egyptian media.¹⁵³ The relationship between the two sides entered a more heated stage when Hamas revealed other documents implicating Fatah in incitement against Hamas in Egypt.¹⁵⁴

On 15/8/2013, 'Azzam al-Ahmad announced that Fatah would not remain hostage to Hamas's whim over the failure to implement the reconciliation agreement, saying that Fatah was examining options and would soon make painful decisions without disclosing their nature.¹⁵⁵ On 25/8/2013, the Fatah Central Committee rejected Hamas's proposal to jointly rule GS.¹⁵⁶ A number of Fatah leaders launched verbal attacks on Hamas, including al-Ahmad, who threatened to return to GS on the back of an Egyptian tank,¹⁵⁷ while Dahlan suggested that he may seek the help of external actors against Hamas's rule.¹⁵⁸

At a time when Fatah asked Hamas leader Abu Marzuq to stop broadcasting incitements against Egypt through Hamas-affiliated satellite channels,¹⁵⁹ Fatah stressed not allowing Hamas to stir up the situation in the WB under the pretext of resistance.¹⁶⁰ When there were calls for rebellion against Hamas rule in GS,



Fatah denied on 3/10/2013 any ties to the Tamarrud movement in GS.¹⁶¹ However, Mahmud ‘Abbas, who visited Egypt on 11/11/2013, did not hesitate to accuse Hamas of disrupting the reconciliation, and to say that people did not know how dangerous Hamas was until after the fall of the MB movement in Egypt. A senior source in the delegation accompanying ‘Abbas even said that what had happened in Egypt was a “divine miracle,” claiming that the US and Israel had helped Hamas take over GS!¹⁶² Fatah media incitement intensified, to the extent that Musa Abu Marzuq said in comments posted on his Facebook page on 6/12/2013, that Hamas has become the central enemy for some Fatah spokespeople instead of Israel...¹⁶³

The above may be placed in the context of Fatah’s escalation in the media against Hamas. However, this could also be understood as a kind of tacit support for tightening the blockade on GS, to topple the Hamas government there. Still, relations began to gradually improve following phone calls between ‘Abbas, and Mish‘al and Haniyyah, paving the way for reconciliatory moves involving the two sides.

5. Hamas and the PIJ

The relationship between Hamas and PIJ was at its best in 2012 and 2013. Since the early days of 2012, Haniyyah had called on the PIJ, during a meeting with its delegation, to conduct an in-depth dialogue to achieve full integration with Hamas.¹⁶⁴ In the midst of their discussions, Muhammad al-Hindi, a PIJ leader, stressed on 18/3/2012 that integration talks with Hamas were progressing positively. Meanwhile, Nafez ‘Azzam, another PIJ leader, said the movement’s relationship with Hamas was in constant evolution, and that there were many milestones that needed to be reached before achieving the desired integration.¹⁶⁵ The relations reached a high level of coordination and partnership in the Israeli-dubbed Operation Pillar of Defense, and the Hamas-dubbed Operation Stones of Baked Clay, 8-day war in November 2012.

Despite the statements made by Hamas leader Mahmud al-Zahhar, on 16/9/2013, regarding forming a joint command with the PIJ, clarifications were later made by leaders in both organizations saying that they had agreed to form a high coordinating committee rather than a joint command.¹⁶⁶ It seems that the relationship between Hamas and the PIJ will continue to be one of coordination, rather than organizational integration, in the foreseeable future.

Fifth: Security Forces and Security Coordination

The PA maintained its coordination with Israeli security forces throughout 2012 and 2013, amid fierce accusations made by Palestinian resistance forces, of which many leaders, cadres, and members were assassinated and arrested, with their activities and infrastructure deeply affected due to meticulous security cooperation by the PA with the occupation. Security coordination appeared more evident every day, through the PA complementary roles with the Israeli security forces; PA security forces continued cracking down on resistance forces, especially Hamas and the PIJ, arrest and detention of their members and cadres, in addition to expulsion from their jobs and economic prosecution against anyone suspected of support for the resistance.

The question of security coordination between the PA and the Israeli occupation is one of the biggest issues of concern to Palestinian citizens. Large numbers of Palestinians oppose coordination, while the PA in Ramallah tries to downplay and justify it.¹⁶⁷ Palestinian resistance factions demand a halt to security coordination with Israel, because it cheapens of all the Palestinian sacrifices over the years, and disregards the suffering of the Palestinians at the hands of Israel, and puts Palestinians at odds with other Palestinians.¹⁶⁸

Security coordination has not only had negative impact on inter-factional relations, but also caused critical cracks in the psychological and communal Palestinian fabric. Security coordination, especially political arrests, has left deep wounds and scars in the hearts of the Palestinians, who have been burned by this phenomenon that began with the inception of the PA and continues to the present day.

The statements made by PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas on 10/10/2013, in which he said his Authority had succeeded 100% in security coordination with Israel on a Palestinian talk show, drew a wave of reactions denouncing and rejecting the principle of security coordination.¹⁶⁹

Political arrests targeting the cadres and supporters of the Palestinian resistance forces take place on a daily basis in the WB, as well as the continuation of raids and closure of institutions, in parallel with the continuation of security coordination with the occupation, all place national values in extreme danger, and promote a spirit of frustration and alienation from the homeland. It prevents the Palestinian



citizens from interacting and working hard for the victory of their people and their cause, and violates national dignity and the human and legal rights of the Palestinians.¹⁷⁰

The state of the security forces do not portend a breakthrough anytime soon, one that would affect their structure and strategy. The leadership of the PA in Ramallah continues to justify security coordination on the basis of security commitments arising from the Oslo Accords and the Road Map for Peace. Accordingly, the PA justifies all measures, and shows boundless openness to commitments and security agreements with the US administration and other stakeholders, including the supply of arms, equipment, training, rehabilitation of security officers, and monitoring of performance in accordance with the tasks set, and refuses to employ Palestinian national security in any attempt to repel incursions or aggression by Israel. While some found reason for optimism in the developments taking place on the national reconciliation issue, and the possibility of this having a positive effect on limiting security coordination with Israel, facts on the ground do not suggest there is a possibility of a concrete change taking place in the security policy of the PA in the WB.

Examining events in 2012 and 2013 may indicate that many aspects of security coordination are kept secret. In early 2012, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak praised security coordination with the PA, saying that stability in the WB was thanks to security cooperation with Israel.¹⁷¹

According to a statement by Central Command Chief Maj. Gen. Nitzan Alon in March 2012, the PA arrested 2,200 resistance members between 2009 and 2010, and a little less than 700 in 2011.¹⁷² Meanwhile, Palestinian information indicate that PA security forces handed over 25 soldiers and settlers who had snuck in to the WB, to Israel in April 2012.¹⁷³ Security coordination reached such a level that Fahmi Shabana, former officer in PA intelligence services said that security coordination was the cause of 25% of arrests of Palestinians who are now held in Israeli prisons.¹⁷⁴

Statistics documented by the Committee of Relatives of Political Detainees in the WB indicated a rise in the number of political detentions in 2013, with 951 arrests and more than 1,820 summons by the Palestinian security forces, an

increase of 121 in 2012, when political arrests numbered 830. The committee documented a marked increase in political arrests against university students and activists from Islamic groups, and the continuation of harassment against prisoners released from Israeli prisons, some of whom had spent more than 19 years locked up, in addition to arrests against many journalists, writers, and young activists.¹⁷⁵

A report of the Information Center at the Ministry of Planning affiliated to the government in Gaza stated that the PA security forces in the WB carried out 720 arrests against members of Hamas, PIJ and other factions during 2013. The report, which was issued on 20/1/2014, mentioned that there were 477 summons, and two deaths at the hands of the PA's Preventive Security Service (PSS) in the WB in 2014. The report also explained that more than 110 individuals were sacked from their jobs on suspicion of supporting Hamas.¹⁷⁶

The Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), which was established by the PA, indicated that in 2012 it received 789 complaints that included allegations of violations of the right to due process of law and unlawful detention, with 563 in the WB, and 226 in GS. In contrast, in 2011, ICHR received 1,026 complaints in this regard, comprising 755 in the WB, and 271 in the GS. The security agencies, which were involved in such violations in the WB are PSS, General Intelligence, and Military Intelligence. In GS, the Internal Security of the Ministry of Interior carried out the detentions.¹⁷⁷

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor reported in 2013 that the Palestinian security forces in the WB and GS carried out more than 800 cases of arbitrary arrests, and nearly 1,400 summons of Palestinian citizens, for matters related to expression of opinion and peaceful assembly. The Observatory mentioned that the security forces of the PA in the WB carried out 723 cases of arbitrary arrest, and 1,137 summons, without legal justification and without judicial authorization in most of those cases. The Observatory said it recorded 117 cases of torture in the WB. Regarding the violations by GS security forces, the Observatory recorded 84 cases of arbitrary arrest, 217 summons, and 22 cases of torture during detention.¹⁷⁸

Incursions by settlers into Joseph's Tomb in Nablus which took place under protection from the PA's security forces, the repeated meetings between PA officials



and ministers with Israeli officers in some areas of the WB, and the periodic meetings between Palestinian and Israeli officers; were nothing exceptional or out of the ordinary. For it is part of the PA security policy towards resistance forces or anyone who poses any kind of threat to Israeli security.¹⁷⁹

Despite statements made by Adnan al-Damiri, spokesperson for the security forces, on 12/6/2012, in which he claimed that security coordination with Israel was at its lowest level for two years (i.e., since 2010),¹⁸⁰ the Israeli media revealed on 2/7/2012 that PA security forces had detained Palestinian officers who rejected security coordination with Israel.¹⁸¹ On 18/12/2012, Israeli Chief of Staff Lieutenant General (Lt.-Gen.) Benny Gantz said that the Authority's security apparatus kept the Israeli army apprised as to the reality of security in all WB areas, allowing it to work against Palestinian "terrorism,"¹⁸² as he put it.

Despite threats by Saeb Erekat to halt security coordination and seek to change the rules of the relationship with Israel,¹⁸³ statistics published by the Israeli media, quoting Israeli security sources at the end of 2012, shows that the PA security forces went even further than the Israeli army in arresting Hamas supporters, which renders such statements devoid of real substance or practical value.¹⁸⁴ On 13/6/2013, Nabil Sha'ath, member of Fatah's Central Committee, stated that the PA spent more money on the security of settlements in the WB and Israel's borders than on education and healthcare, thus shedding light on the dangers and absurdity brought about by security coordination with Israel.¹⁸⁵

In the context of its security efforts, a Palestinian security source admitted that the PA foiled 10 commando operations in the territories occupied in 1948.¹⁸⁶ On 25/10/2013, Israeli media revealed that the PA security forces arrested a Hamas cell in Hebron that planned to launch explosive-laden Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) into Israel.¹⁸⁷ On 1/11/2013, Hamas accused PA security forces of providing security information to Israeli security forces, causing the arrest of three Hamas leaders in Ramallah and calling on the PA to review security coordination with the occupation.¹⁸⁸

Thus, it is clear how strongly committed the PA is to its security function and coordination with Israel, and how willing it is to continue this function and its requirements during the next phase.

Conclusion

The internal Palestinian situation during 2012 and 2013 was characteristically complex and rife with many overlapping issues. A number of factors pushed toward opposing directions that fluctuated up and down in their ability to influence the internal situation. The fundamental crisis arising from the Palestinian division continued to dominate the Palestinian agenda, with the failure to implement the reconciliation program and to reform Palestinian institutions. The Palestinian agenda also continued to be affected by the crisis over the inability to decide on specific directions and destinations for national action, whether on the path of the peace process or the path of armed resistance.

The Israeli occupation in the WB and the blockade of the GS, in addition to the presence of two diametrically opposed administrations in Ramallah and Gaza City, continued to adversely affect national action in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. Furthermore, the failure of the PLO to accommodate all the components and forces of the Palestinian people; its inability to revive its institutions and the role of the Palestinians inside and outside Palestine; nay the decline of the PLO to become akin to a department of the PA, which in turn remains subordinate to the occupation and its conditions; squandered the energy of the Palestinian people; at a time when Israel pressed ahead with its Judaization plans and settlement building, altering the facts on the ground.

The revolutions and changes that swept the Arab world had an impact on the internal situation in Palestine. Between 2012 and 2013 (especially the first 18 months), the pro-resistance forces, especially Islamists, wagered on the success of these uprisings and the rise of “political Islam.” However, the counter-revolution, peaking with the military coup in Egypt and the way the MB movement was dealt with as a “terrorist” group, the ban on Hamas in Egypt, and the crippling blockade of GS, cast a negative shadow (even if a short-term one) on the Palestinian Islamist movement. This reality was further entrenched with the expanding scope of attacks against Islamist movements in the countries that saw uprisings or regime change, or even in those countries that were anticipating such events without revolutions even taking place.

Some were prompted to wager on the peace process, with talks resuming following the coup in Egypt, and to not rush the process of Palestinian reconciliation,



except in line with conditions that would see Hamas contained as the weaker party. However, the path of the peace process, which could end only with failure or with historical concessions that the Palestinian people reject; rising extremism in Israeli society and government; the lack of an American and international desire to put pressure on Israel; and the structural, political, and economic crises of the PA; will compel the Palestinians to ultimately return to the path of reconciliation.

We are now operating in an Arab environment characterized by liquidity and still in the process of being formed, especially in the area around Palestine. It is difficult to predict a mending of the internal Palestinian situation (at this stage) on the unstable Arab situation that did not take its final form. Therefore, putting the internal political house in order must be on the basis of positive initiatives from both sides of the divide, as well as confidence-building programs that accommodate everyone in the national project, rather than on the basis of political opportunism or seeking help from external actors against opponents.

Overcoming the internal Palestinian crisis requires a serious stand to determine the course and priorities of national action, to agree on Palestinian red lines, and to settle questions related to the paths of the peace process and resistance, as well as the future and role of the PA; otherwise, reconciliation programs will continue to carry the seeds of crisis and its own failures within them.

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This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013 is the eighth in a series of annual resourceful academic studies. It 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 near future. This Report has become a basic reference on Palestinian studies, it is a must read for all those concerned.

An outstanding team of 13 academics and experts contributed to this Report in seven chapters. They covered the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli–Palestinian relations including wars and the peace process. They also discuss the Arab, Muslim and international stances towards the Palestinian issue. This Report focuses, also, on the issue of Jerusalem and the holy sites, and the suffering of man and land under the Israeli occupation. Besides, the demographic, economic and education indicators are, also, studied and analyzed.

Al-Zaytouna Centre, as usual, has surpassed other reports in this superlative work. It is a serious addition to the field of Palestinian studies, and those interested in this field, including specialists, experts, libraries of universities and research centers, should have their copies of this Report.

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012 – 2013



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