

The Palestinian Strategic Report

2014 – 2015

Ch. 1



The Internal Palestinian Situation

2014 – 2015



The Internal Palestinian situation¹

Introduction

The crises and divisions in the internal Palestinian scene continued during 2014 and 2015. Despite the brutal Israeli assault on Gaza Strip (GS) in the summer of 2014, and the huge destruction and devastation it wrought, and despite the progress achieved by internal reconciliation efforts in Palestine with the formation of the National Consensus Government in early June 2014, the political, geographic, and administrative division continued to dominate the landscape without any real change.

The government did not extend its control over GS, or the government institutions and administrative structures there. Border crossings and civil servants in GS became the main points of contention in the ongoing crisis between Hamas and Fatah and the national accord government on the other. Meanwhile, the suffering of the GS people continued, as a result of the ongoing blockade and the failure of the new government to deliver services.

In 2014 and 2015, security coordination between security forces in Ramallah and their Israeli counterparts continued, despite the impasse in the negotiations and the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* (uprising), and despite decisions issued by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Council (PCC) calling for an end to security coordination with Israel. Frustration among Palestinians grew, meanwhile, as the reconstruction of GS stalled, because donor countries failed to fulfil their financial pledges.

First: The Governments of Ramallah and GS

The Palestinian Authority (PA) government in Ramallah, headed by Rami Hamdallah, continued with its functions in the first five months of 2014. At the political level, the government adhered to the framework set by Hamdallah when he was sworn in; at the time, he said his government was the government of President 'Abbas and was committed to the PLO program.²

¹ This study is the approved English translation of chapter one of the book entitled: *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015*, edited by Dr. Mohsen Moh'd Saleh. Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations in Beirut released the Arabic version in 2016. The first draft of this chapter was written by Mr. Mu'min Bsiso.

² *Al Bayan* newspaper, Dubai, 7/6/2013.

Despite Palestinian calls for neutrality over the incidents in Egypt following the military coup of 3/7/2013, the Palestinian Minister of Labor Ahmad al-Majdalani soon proclaimed that toppling “political Islam” was a help to the Palestinian issue.³ Although his views did not necessarily reflect those of the government, the statement exacerbated the polarization and sent a negative message to Palestinian Islamist movements led by Hamas and Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ).

Hamdallah, upon taking his constitutional oath before President Mahmud ‘Abbas on 6/6/2013, said the government would pay close attention to resisting Israeli settlement activity and supporting Palestinian farmers on their lands.⁴ Hamdallah said the main obstacle to economic growth was the occupation, which he said must end.⁵ However, his government’s actions were limited to such statements regarding resisting settlements, defending Jerusalem, and defending *al-Aqsa* Mosque against Judaization and raids by settlers. The Palestinian government praised the residents of the Qasra village in the northern West Bank (WB), who detained 10 settler attackers in January 2014 before they were handed over to the Israeli army, saying this was an act of self-defense.⁶ However, an anti-settler government and community safety network that Hamdallah promised to establish on 17/1/2014 in order to defend Palestinian villages, did not materialize.⁷

Regarding the issue of Palestinian prisoners and liberated prisoners, the government reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the amended Prisoners and Liberated Prisoners Law of 2014, and to do everything required to ensure a decent life for them.⁸ However, the commission following up prisoners and detainees’ emanating from the factional coordination committee in Nablus said that there was deliberate prevarication by the government in implementing this commitment.⁹

The Hamdallah government fulfilled a part of its commitments vis-à-vis GS, resuming the payment of salaries to civil servants that the Ramallah government recognizes (most of whom had previously been absconders at the request of Ramallah). This accounted for nearly 69% of expenditures on GS. The government

³ *Almasry Alyoum* newspaper, Cairo, 12/3/2014.

⁴ *Al Bayan*, 7/6/2013.

⁵ *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper, London, 7/6/2013.

⁶ *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 10/1/2014.

⁷ Site of Elbadil, 17/1/2014, <http://bit.ly/25W9IFr>

⁸ Site of Rejada Media Network, 1/4/2014, <http://bit.ly/22qx14F>

⁹ Ma’an News Agency, 5/4/2014, <http://www.maannews.net/Content.aspx?id=687555>



also paid the bills for a number of services.¹⁰ It dispatched a convoy carrying medicines, laboratory items, and medical equipment and supplies to GS. Hamdallah, addressing the people of GS, said: “You are not alone in facing the blockade and its repercussions. We are with you and our whole people are behind you.”¹¹

Among the challenges faced by the Hamdallah government was corruption in government institutions. A 2014 report on corruption issued by Transparency Palestine, underscored the lack of transparency in the PA revenues, the collection of which is overseen by Israel. Israel is accused of protecting corrupt individuals. Furthermore, the high cost of healthcare was squandering the health budget. Another challenge was the continued abuse of using government vehicles and public funds, in light of weak oversight and accountability in the General Directorate of Permits, all as the wages given to officials in non-ministerial official institutions and bodies continued to rise.¹²

Despite al-Shati’ Agreement signed on 23/4/2014, in which Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a National Consensus Government replacing the two governments of Ramallah and GS, in May 2014 the government stopped the distribution of the *Felesteen* daily newspaper affiliated to Hamas. This was despite an agreement had been reached between Fatah and Hamas to allow newspapers from GS and the WB to be distributed in both regions.¹³

The Ramallah government resigned in April 2014 following the al-Shati’ Agreement, but continued to serve until 2/6/2014, when the National Consensus Government was sworn in before the PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas.

For its part, the caretaker government in GS headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah of Hamas continued serving until such time as the National Consensus Government took over, too. During that period, the Haniyyah government faced immense challenges on two levels: the crippling blockade on GS, which severely

¹⁰ See the report of Committee of Public Censorship, Human Rights and Public Freedoms on the Palestinian Authority (PA) 2014 budget, consecration of Gaza Strip (GS) blockade, First Session of the Fourth Extraordinary Session – 90th Meeting, Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Gaza, 3/6/2015, site of The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 14/6/2015, <http://bit.ly/1Y8Bzi8> (in Arabic)

¹¹ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 15/2/2012.

¹² Integrity and Anti-Corruption Report 2014 “Absolute Authority is an Absolute Corruption,” site of Transparency Palestine, 28/4/2015, <http://www.aman-palestine.org/ar/reports-and-studies/2375.html> (in Arabic)

¹³ Site of Felesteen Online, 8/5/2014, <http://www.felesteen.ps/>

exacerbated the suffering of its residents; and the continuation of political and security tensions between the Haniyyah government and the Egyptian authorities.

The government took over after Isma‘il Haniyyah declared the beginning of Palestinian reconciliation, and announced a series of decisions to push reconciliation forward, which was welcomed by President ‘Abbas and Fatah.¹⁴ Haniyyah announced 120 cadres of Fatah would be returning to GS as part of a goodwill gesture towards the implementation of reconciliation, stressing that the government and Hamas had provided positive initiatives to push forward the reconciliation.¹⁵ Haniyyah took further steps towards reconciliation on 23/3/2014 when he presented a road map for ending the division on the basis of partnership and armed resistance.¹⁶

Following the signing of the al-Shati’ Agreement on 23/4/2014, a wave of optimism prevailed in the ranks of Haniyyah’s government regarding the formation of a consensus government capable of ending the suffering of the GS people and resolve the Strip’s major crisis, amid assurances it would not abandon its core political principles. Haniyyah appeared more optimistic when he said that an agreement had been reached to create a national fund to compensate the victims of the division worth of \$¹⁷60 million.¹⁸

In the midst of the efforts to form the National Consensus Government, Haniyyah stressed that Hamas was handing over power voluntarily for the sake of the people and their unity.¹⁹ However, on a second occasion, he said that Hamas’s exit from the government did not mean leaving power.²⁰ Haniyyah’s government said it was ready to abide by the commitments of reconciliation and hand over all tasks to the National Consensus Government. When its ministers were being sworn in, Haniyyah stressed that Hamas and his previous government had done everything they could to end the division, and expressed full readiness to cooperate with the new government.²¹

¹⁴ Alray – Palestinian Media Agency, 6/1/2014, <http://www.alray.ps/ar/>

¹⁵ PIC, 27/1/2014.

¹⁶ Felesteen Online, 23/3/2014.

¹⁷ US Dollar

¹⁸ Felesteen Online, 16/5/2014.

¹⁹ Felesteen Online, 20/5/2014.

²⁰ Alray, 27/5/2014.

²¹ Alray, 2/6/2014.



At the same time, Haniyyah's government made significant efforts to support the resistance. Haniyyah said, in an event organized by the Ministry of Interior in GS, that his government would not abandon its responsibility to protect the "back of the resistance." He stressed that the Interior Ministry forces constituted the solid nucleus of a security structure that extended over all the Palestinian land occupied in 1967.²² On 10/3/2014, Haniyyah reiterated his government's position on the resistance, confirming that it was a red line that could be waived, and that its weapons were aimed at Israel only.²³ On another occasion, Haniyyah stressed that the capture of Israeli soldiers was at the top of the agenda of Hamas and the Palestinian resistance, stressing that the liberation of Palestinians prisoners could only be achieved by capturing Israeli soldiers.²⁴

Haniyyah's government maintained its ability to control the internal security situation in the Strip. Following the signing of al-Shati' Agreement, Haniyyah warned that reconciliation did not mean the return to security chaos again, stressing that an Arab committee would oversee the rebuilding of the security forces in accordance with the reconciliation agreement.²⁵

On more than one occasion, Haniyyah and security officials stressed that they were keen on preserving Egypt's security and good relations with Cairo, despite the smear campaigns led by some sections of the Egyptian media against Hamas and the people of the Strip, following the coup against President Muhammad Morsi.²⁶ At a time when the relationship between the Egyptian authorities and Hamas had taken a sharp turn, and especially in light of the decision to ban Hamas and indict some of its commanders, some of whom were dead, the government dealt with this quietly, denying any interference in internal Egyptian affairs.²⁷

Second: The National Consensus Government

The National Consensus Government was formed under the leadership of Rami Hamdallah on 2/6/2014, ending the administrative duplicity and conflict between

²² Palestinian National Authority, Ministry of Interior, 13/1/2014, <http://www.moi.gov.ps/>

²³ Felesteen Online, 10/3/2014.

²⁴ Alray, 15/4/2014.

²⁵ Felesteen Online, 15/5/2014.

²⁶ Felesteen Online, 15/2/2014.

²⁷ Alray, 4/3/2014; and Quds Press International News Agency, London, 29/3/2014, <http://www.qudspress.com/>

the two branches of the PA in the WB and GS, amid a climate of optimism at both the popular and official levels. There was a belief in the government's ability to accomplish the tasks allotted to it, where there are major problems and great suffering left behind by the division. But those hopes quickly evaporated on account of the differences between Fatah and Hamas, as efforts to heal the rift between them failed.

We turn to look at the top issues the government tackled upon its formation until the end of 2015, as follows:

1. The Relationship with GS

Differences and tensions marred the relationship between the government and the GS, which remained under de facto Hamas control. Differences erupted between Hamas and Fatah shortly before the National Consensus Government was declared regarding the Ministries of Prisoners and Foreign Affairs. Then another dispute emerged when Hamdallah declared that his government was committed to the PLO's political program, which was rejected by Hamas. Only a few days later, the salary crisis became the main issue of contention; the government refused to pay the salaries of the employees of the previous Haniyyah government, who numbered almost 40 thousand, and decided to form a legal committee to look into the issue of civil servants in accordance with the law and administrative needs.²⁸

Government spokesperson Ihab Bseiso said, "The government has done its utmost to resolve the GS salaries crisis, [but] since Qatar declared its readiness to transfer \$20 million a month to cover the salaries of GS civil servants, the banks refused to receive these funds of fear of being harassed by the Israeli side."²⁹ The National Consensus Government stressed that it was seeking to secure financial support from Arab countries to deal with all the repercussions of the division.³⁰ Prime Minister Hamdallah said, "the PA will not pay the salaries of 40 thousand employees so the crisis (the crisis of non-payment of previous GS government employees' salaries) may reignite, due to the absence of confirmed commitments by Qatar or any other country to pay those sums."³¹ Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki said that neither the Palestinian government nor the Fatah movement had

²⁸ *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 11/6/2014; and Palestinian Press Agency (Safa), 13/6/2014, <http://safa.ps>

²⁹ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 6/6/2014.

³⁰ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 11/6/2014.

³¹ *Asharq Alawsat*, 22/6/2014.



agreed to pay the salaries of Hamas's civil servants, and claimed that blaming this crisis on the new government from the first day was a reflection of "bad intentions."³²

When an Israeli assault on GS began, on 8/7/2014, the government declared a state of emergency to support the Gazans.³³ It raised the emergency aid level to GS to 55 million shekels³⁴ (\$16 million), before again allocating an additional 10 million shekels (\$2.9 million) to support GS.³⁵ Despite some tense positions issued by PA officials, including that of Security Forces Spokesman Adnan al-Damiri, who threatened not to admit the Palestinians being sacrificed for factional interests, accusing Hamas of targeting Fatah members in GS,³⁶ the government confirmed that it would meet its responsibilities towards the GS.

After the war, the salaries crisis entered a difficult phase. The Union of GS Civil Servants threatened to prevent PA employees from entering their workplaces until the crisis was resolved. Hamdallah commented on his failure to tackle the problem by saying, "My hands are tied and so are my feet, and I am being asked to swim." He also said, "The government and banks operating in the Palestinian territories have been warned that in the event (salaries of employees of) the Hamas previous government in GS were to be paid, the government will be boycotted." He added, "All the countries of the world bar none have warned that the government and the Palestinian people would be boycotted if these funds are paid," saying that if that happens, the Palestinian banking system would suffer great problems that would pose a threat to the Palestinian situation.³⁷

The National Consensus Government took a practical step towards GS when the entire cabinet visited the Strip on 9/10/2014, holding an extraordinary session there. During the meeting, Hamdallah promised to resolve all of GS's problems in the coming period.³⁸

However, Hamas Member of Parliament (MP) 'Atif 'Adwan said that Hamdallah did not fulfil his promises in solving the GS problems.³⁹ However, the

³² *Asharq Alawsat*, 22/6/2014.

³³ *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 10/7/2014.

³⁴ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 25/7/2014.

³⁵ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 31/7/2014.

³⁶ Quds Press, 15/8/2014; and site of Aljazeera.net, 19/8/2014, <http://www.aljazeera.net>

³⁷ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 8/9/2014.

³⁸ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 10/10/2014; and *Al-Hayat*, 10/10/2014.

³⁹ *Asharq Alawsat*, 26/10/2014.

latter offered the payment of \$1,200 to GS civil servants as part of a Qatari grant aimed at helping resolve the salaries crisis.⁴⁰ The Deputy Head of Hamas's Political Bureau Musa Abu Marzuq stressed that Hamas would not abandon the civil servants in GS, and that the de facto government was working hard to secure their rights in line with those of other PA employees. He cautioned that things would be very difficult if the crisis was not resolved.⁴¹

A visit by Rami Hamdallah and his government to GS in November 2014, which was meant to follow up reconciliation issues and resolve problems facing GS, was postponed, following bombings that targeted the homes of Fatah leaders and a ceremonial stage set up to commemorate the anniversary of President Yasir 'Arafat's death. As expected, a new crisis ensued between Hamas and the government. The GS Interior Ministry said that the failure to allocate a budget for the Ministry was affecting its work.⁴² This prompted a response from Hamdallah, who said Hamas was the actual security authority in GS,⁴³ in turn prompting the Ministry to say it lacked the administrative authority on account of Hamdallah's refusal to cooperate.⁴⁴

With the end of the year, the government decided, in a session held in GS, on the return of absconders and the assimilation of appointees since Hamas's takeover, declaring the spending by the PA on GS was no less than 47%.⁴⁵

However, mutual accusations soon returned. The Hamas led Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), held a session in GS in January 2015, considering the government's decisions as invalid and unconstitutional.⁴⁶ That happened at a time when the government conditioned carrying out its duties in GS on being allowed to do so without any obstacles,⁴⁷ having accused Hamas of obstructing its work and its bid to impose its sovereignty over the Strip. In January 2015, some post offices and banks, which are subject to the administration of the Hamas movement in the GS, began disbursing financial advances to the GS staff, who had not been yet recognized by the National Consensus Government.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 29/10/2014.

⁴¹ Site of Alresalah Press, 4/12/2014, <http://alresalah.ps/ar/>

⁴² PIC, 9/11/2014.

⁴³ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 23/11/2014.

⁴⁴ PIC, 22/11/2014.

⁴⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 6/1/2015.

⁴⁶ *Alray*, 7/1/2015.

⁴⁷ Palestine News and Information Agency (Wafa), 7/1/2015,

<http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php>

⁴⁸ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/1/2015.



Tensions between Hamas and the government intensified when the Interior Ministry in GS in mid-March 2015 published confessions of PA security officers, who snitched on resistance operatives and carried out a series of bombings in GS.⁴⁹

Before the end of March, Hamdallah visited GS along with a senior delegation from his government, at the direct guidance of President ‘Abbas. Their mission was to cement internal reconciliation, and find a solution to the problem of employees in return for taking control of border crossings controlled by civil servants from the previous Haniyyah government, but these efforts failed.

On 7/4/2015, the government re-formed the legal committee studying the civil servants issue, and formed a committee to take over GS’s crossings.⁵⁰ This was followed by a visit by a ministerial delegation from the government to the GS on 20/4/2015 to discuss the civil servants issue, but the delegation cut short the visit, blaming Hamas for preventing them from performing duties in the Strip. ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, Fatah Central Committee member in charge of the reconciliation dossier, said: “The unity of the country is more important than all civil servants and governments. The unity of institutions is the unity of the country, and the unity of the government is the unity of the PA and legal unity.” He then claimed that Hamas had undermined everything, turning the issue of the civil servants into a pretext to disrupt the implementation of the reconciliation agreement.⁵¹

On 3/6/2015, the PLC convened in GS in the presence of Hamas deputies. The meeting accused the PA of corruption and of looting GS’s funds, calling for those responsible in the PA to be investigated.⁵² In June 2015, Hamdallah said the leadership and the government were willing to resolve the issue of GS’s civil servants, but only in parallel with the handover of the crossings in GS to the government.⁵³

Abu Marzuq said the crisis of the civil servants in GS was one of the instruments of the immoral war against Hamas. He said the issue would not have arisen if the National Consensus Government had undertaken its responsibilities towards GS including assimilating the civil servants and fulfilling their rights under the reconciliation accord. Abu Marzuq pointed out that during the

⁴⁹ Palestinian National Authority, Ministry of Interior, 14/3/2015.

⁵⁰ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 8/4/2015.

⁵¹ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 27/5/2015.

⁵² Felesteen Online, 3/6/2015; and Alray, 3/6/2015.

⁵³ Alray, 10/6/2015.

negotiations for the ceasefire in Cairo, the Egyptian side had said there was no Israeli or American objection to the civil servants issue, and had said it was an internal issue. Abu Marzuq pointed out that government members would always respond to the movement's demands regarding the civil servants by saying the decision was political and in the hands of President 'Abbas.⁵⁴

The Rafah crossing between GS and Egypt was an explosive point of contention between Hamas on the one hand, and the PA and Egypt on the other hand. Egypt insisted on the National Consensus Government taking over the crossing as its condition for agreeing to reopen it and ending the humanitarian crisis ravaging GS as a result of its closure. However, Hamas insisted this take place as part of the implementation of all the clauses of the reconciliation agreement, including compelling the government to disburse the salaries of the civil servants appointed by the Haniyyah government. The dispute prompted a factional initiative proposed to Hamas and the government at the end of 2015, with a view to resolving the crisis, but at the time of writing it has yet to be met with any serious response from either side.

The kidnapping of four members of Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas, after crossing into Egypt via Rafah in August 2015, as well as the Egyptian government's flooding of tunnels along the border with GS in September 2015, caused major tension between Hamas on the one hand, and Fatah, PA, and the Egyptian authorities on the other. Hamas held the Egyptian government fully responsible for the lives of four fighters, and called for their immediate release.⁵⁵

Hamas also accused President 'Abbas and the PA of inciting the Egyptian authorities against GS and its people, following statements made by Egyptian President 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi who said that all procedures at the border were being coordinated between Egypt and the PA.⁵⁶

Concerning the GS reconstruction following the Israeli assault of 2014, the government prepared a detailed plan estimating a cost of around \$4 billion, and affirmed it would be fully responsible for following up this issue. This chapter details this dossier in the later section "The Repercussions of the Israeli Aggression on GS in the summer of 2014 on the Internal Palestinian Situation."

⁵⁴ Alray, 11/7/2015.

⁵⁵ Felesteen Online, 24/8/2015.

⁵⁶ Aljazeera.net, 27/9/2015.



2. The Cabinet Reshuffle

Administratively, on 2/9/2014 the government approved the decision to abolish the Ministry of Prisoners and turn it into a higher national commission.⁵⁷ On 10/12/2014, Ziad Abu Ein, head of the Commission Against the Separation Wall and Settlements, died after he was assaulted by Israeli soldiers during a protest against the Separation Wall north of Ramallah.⁵⁸ On 30/7/2015, President ‘Abbas and Prime Minister Hamdallah agreed to a cabinet reshuffle covering five portfolios, which drew criticisms from Palestinian factions led by Hamas. Hamas said it did not recognize the new ministers.

3. Political Issues

No substantive political events occurred in 2014–2015. At the end of September 2015, President ‘Abbas delivered a speech in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, in which he declared that the PA could not continue to be bound by all political, security and economic agreements with Israel, citing the refusal of all successive Israeli governments to abide by them. However, the year 2015 passed without any practical steps taken by the PA to fulfil the promises of President ‘Abbas.

The PA resorted to making such positions after the failure of several attempts to go to the UN Security Council with draft resolutions imposing a timeframe for ending the occupation by 2017. The last of these was a French-sponsored resolution aimed at reviving the political process between the PA and Israel, which France withdrew under US and Israeli pressure in early July 2015.

In early 2015, the PA filed an official request to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), after the PA signed up to join a number of international treaties and conventions including the Rome Statute establishing the ICC, in response to the Security Council’s failure to pass a resolution to set a timeframe to end the occupation.⁵⁹ On 18/05/2015, Palestine received formal approval to join the World Customs Organization (WCO). On 3/8/2015, Palestine filed an official request to join INTERPOL.

As Israeli crimes continued in the aftermath of the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, the Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki called on the European

⁵⁷ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 3/9/2014.

⁵⁸ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 11/12/2014.

⁵⁹ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 2/1/2015; and *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 3/1/2015.

Union (EU) to play an active role in the peace process.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Arab foreign ministers supported reviewing agreements with Israel according to the PCC decisions, if the situation remained unchanged.⁶¹ (See Section 5 of Chapter Two entitled The Peace Process)

4. The Financial and Economic Situation

The National Consensus Government faced no serious tests in the financial and economic dossiers, until after the Israeli government withheld Palestinian tax revenues in retaliation against the PA after it lobbied for a draft Security Council resolution calling for the end of the occupation in December 2014. As a result, according to Minister of Finance Shukri Bishara, the government lost up to 70% of its revenues.⁶² According to the Governor of Palestine Monetary Authority Jihad al-Wazir, the government faced a severe financial crisis. Banks were forced to decline to give loans to cover civil servants' salaries.⁶³ Consequently, the government approved an emergency budget for the year 2015, starting on 01/04/2015, in order to rationalize expenditure and increase revenues. Finance Minister Shukri Bishara stressed that as soon as the financial crisis ended, he would present a new supplementary budget.⁶⁴

On 18/4/2015, the government reached a deal with Israel to unlock tax revenues, with some deductions, especially in the electricity sector.⁶⁵ As a result of the financial crisis, the PA's public debt rose by 7.1% during the first quarter of 2015,⁶⁶ forcing the government to allocate 400 million shekels (\$100 million) to pay off the dues of the private sector.⁶⁷ In 2015, foreign financial support declined, Minister Bishara said that it dropped by 22%,⁶⁸ while the Finance Ministry said at the end of September 2015 that the treasury had received only 28% of expected foreign aid and grants.⁶⁹ (For more detail, see Section 2 of Chapter Seven entitled the Economic Situation of the PA)

⁶⁰ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 8/11/2015.

⁶¹ *Al-Hayat*, 10/11/2015.

⁶² *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 12/2/2015.

⁶³ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 16/3/2015.

⁶⁴ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 16/3/2015.

⁶⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 19/4/2015.

⁶⁶ Felesteen Online, 28/4/2015.

⁶⁷ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 19/4/2015.

⁶⁸ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 12/7/2015.

⁶⁹ *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, Beirut, 28/9/2015.



5. The Security Situation

The internal security situation of the National Consensus Government covered the geographical scope of the WB alone, seeing as it was unable to impose its authority on GS, as it claimed, because of obstacles placed by Hamas.

With the exception of Israeli raids (which in many cases took place in coordination with Palestinian security forces) on PA controlled areas, the internal security situation of the settlers and the occupation was acceptable to Israeli officials. The Palestinian security forces carried out crackdowns and arrests against Hamas and PIJ activists. Dozens of Hamas members were arrested, accused by the PA of preparing attacks against Israeli targets to undermine the security of the WB and other attacks against the PA itself. Hamas categorically rejected the PA's account.⁷⁰

Interestingly, the PA denied any breach of security in the areas it controls by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group, following Israeli claims to the contrary in early 2015, with Israel claiming to have arrested cells affiliated to the jihadist group in Hebron in the WB.⁷¹

With the outbreak of the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, in early October 2015, dominated by stabbing and ramming attacks, the government and its security forces observed neutrality on the ground in most times. It defended the Palestinians' right to protect themselves and stressed that violence and repression by Israel could only generate more violence. The government condemned Israeli terrorism and executions, stressing that the crimes of the settlers had been the main factor in igniting the situation in the WB.⁷² And while the government expressed its objection to the militarization of the *Intifadah* and the use of arms,⁷³ it called for international protection for the Palestinian people.⁷⁴

When Jordan signed an agreement with Israel to install surveillance cameras at *al-Aqsa* Mosque to control the security situation on the ground, the government refused this agreement, and said it was a trap that would lead to arrests against

⁷⁰ Reuters News Agency, 3/7/2015, <http://ara.reuters.com>; *al-Hayat*, 4/7/2015; and *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 6/7/2015.

⁷¹ Aljazeera.net, 4/1/2015.

⁷² *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 11/10/2015.

⁷³ *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 11/10/2015.

⁷⁴ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 19/10/2015.

Palestinians under the pretext of incitement.⁷⁵ (See Section 5 of this Chapter entitled Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination and its Repercussions on the Internal Palestinian Situation).

Third: National Reconciliation and Putting the Palestinian House in Order

National reconciliation was the key issue for Palestinians in 2014 and 2015, as it affected their national cause and daily lives. However, the failure of the two main parties to implement reconciliation agreements drove Palestinians to despair over the possibility of ending the division and estrangement between the two. The tone of talk about reconciliation lowered and was soon met with indifference and apathy among the majority of frustrated Palestinians.

Attempts to reach accord between Fatah and Hamas, and all the previous agreements—from the Cairo Accords up to the time of writing—proved that reconciliation in the proposed format was almost impossible to implement. The main reason was that the essence of the division was not addressed directly or clearly. Rather, secondary measures were agreed or escapist solutions reached, such as the formation of a National Consensus Government or beginning preparations for elections, while the essence of division was always the fundamental conflict between the resistance project and the peace process project.

Mahmud ‘Abbas officially declared in League of Arab States meetings after the war on GS in 2014, and again in his speech at the GS Reconstruction Conference in Cairo, that there could be no reconciliation except on the basis of:

1. A unified political decision in war and peace.
2. Unified arms.
3. Unified authority.

If the unified political decision here means the decision to negotiate, hold accord, recognize the Oslo Accords and renounce violence, then this is something neither Hamas nor the PIJ or the PFLP and other factions would accept. If unified arms mean the exclusivity of arms of the security forces, commitment to security coordination with Israel and the elimination of armed resistance and the uprising, and everything that is classed as violent including stone throwing, stabbings, and

⁷⁵*Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 26/10/2015; and site of Arabi21, 26/10/2015, <http://arabi21.com/>



so on, then this meant that there would be a disarmament of resistance in GS and handing over of the tunnels and other means of resistance. And if the unified authority means the authority in GS should come under the control and commitments of the most prominent party in the WB, then all the conditions of Mahmud ‘Abbas for reconciliation entail commitments that cannot be accepted by the resistance forces.

The year 2014 started with a positive climate reigning over the relationship between Fatah and Hamas. An agreement was reached between ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, the Fatah official in charge of the dossier, and Isma‘il Haniyyah, deputy chief of Hamas’s political bureau, to meet and discuss the formation of National Consensus Government and end the division between the WB and GS.⁷⁶ The efforts bore fruit in a meeting between Hamas and Fatah delegations on 9/2/2014 at Haniyyah’s home, to draft a plan to implement the reconciliation agreements.⁷⁷

The situation remained the same until 23/04/2014, with the signing of al-Shati’ Agreement following a meeting between a PLO delegation headed by ‘Azzam al-Ahmad and a Hamas delegation headed by Haniyyah in the latter’s home in al-Shati’ Refugee Camp. The declaration stipulated the implementation of the reconciliation clauses, first and foremost the formation of a National Consensus Government and convening a committee to activate the PLO within five weeks, followed by legislative, presidential, and national council elections simultaneously within six months of the formation of the government.⁷⁸

At a time when the Palestinian factions and the public welcomed the declaration, Nayef Hawatmeh, secretary general of Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), criticized it, cautioning that the Fatah-Hamas National Consensus Government would be short-lived.⁷⁹

On 28/5/2014, Fatah and Hamas ended their consultations regarding the formation of the government, and agreed to appoint Rami Hamdallah as prime minister. The official declaration of the government took place on 2/6/2014, and its tasks were determined as: reuniting civil and security institutions; the reconstruction of GS; and the restoration of cohesion between the WB and GS, despite some differences between Hamas and the Palestinian presidency.

⁷⁶ Felesteen Online, 10/1/2014.

⁷⁷ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/11/2014.

⁷⁸ Alray, 23/4/2014.

⁷⁹ *Alghad*, 19/5/2014.

A month after the government began its work, the first fundamental difference between Hamas and the government emerged over the issue of civil servants. Hamas rejected the government's decision to make a distinction between previous Fatah-affiliated employees who absconded after the events of 2007 and who were allowed to return to their jobs, and Hamas-affiliated employees who had to undergo legal and administrative reassessment before being paid their salaries. Hamas said this breached the reconciliation agreements.⁸⁰

However, the relationship between Hamas and Fatah and the National Consensus Government took the form of suppressed (and sometimes open) tension after three settlers were killed by resistance fighters (who later turned out to be from Hamas) on 12/6/2014; and after Hamas's battle against the Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 and its insistence on specific conditions to end the fighting. Although a joint Palestinian delegation from Fatah, Hamas, and other factions was formed to lead ceasefire negotiations in Cairo, the leadership of Fatah especially Mahmud 'Abbas were irritated by Hamas's "monopoly" of the resistance in GS. 'Abbas accused Hamas of establishing a shadow government in GS, which was denied by Hamas, saying his statements undermined national unity.⁸¹

In an attempt to contain the situation after the end of the war, Fatah formed a special committee to visit GS and engage with Hamas regarding key Palestinian issues including reconciliation. However, no meeting was held until 25/9/2014 in Cairo, where they agreed to resolve outstanding issues, most importantly political partnership, allowing the government to carry out its work in GS, the reconstruction of GS, and pay the salaries of civil servants.

Subsequently, no tangible progress was made regarding the accords' implementation, until November 2014 when Fatah declared its intention to send a high-level delegation to GS to overcome the obstacles especially in light of the return of media bickering. This delegation also went in order to participate in commemorations marking the 10th anniversary of the death of Yasir 'Arafat.⁸² The efforts were aborted following a series of bombings targeting the homes of Fatah leaders in GS and a stage set up at the 'Arafat commemoration event on 7/11/2014, prompting Fatah to hold Hamas responsible for the bombings by virtue of its

⁸⁰ PIC, 1/7/2014; Alresalah Press, 2/7/2014; and *Alghad*, 6/7/2014.

⁸¹ Quds Press, 29/8/2014.

⁸² *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5/11/2014.



authority over the Strip,⁸³ despite the latter's condemnation and call for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.⁸⁴ The various Palestinian factions also condemned the bombings.⁸⁵

In response, Khalil al-Hayyeh, Hamas political bureau member, threatened to withdraw confidence from the government, accusing President 'Abbas of obstructing its work and of treating GS like a remote village.⁸⁶ For his part, Muhammad Faraj al-Ghoul, chairman of Hamas's PLC bloc, said that the government lacked legal and constitutional legitimacy for having failed to secure a vote of confidence in the council.⁸⁷ At the same time, Hamas Spokesperson Isma'il Radwan called for the government to be dissolved, accusing it of failing to fulfill its responsibilities towards the people of the GS.⁸⁸ Accordingly, four factions: PIJ, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the DFLP, and the Palestinian People's Party (PPP), tried to heal the rift between Fatah and Hamas, but to no avail.⁸⁹

Prior the end of the time frame agreed for the National Consensus Government on 2/12/2014, tensions rose again. Musa Abu Marzuq called on Hamas to form a national unity government as an alternative to the existing government, accusing President 'Abbas of being unable to take the political decisions required to rescue the reconciliation,⁹⁰ and denying the presence of a shadow government run by Hamas in GS.⁹¹

With the beginning of 2015, a wave of optimism came when Rami Hamdallah announced his intention to visit GS, pledging to find solutions to GS's problems within four weeks.⁹² However, a government statement stressed that it would not be able to fulfill its role until it was allowed to fully exercise its powers without factional obstructions in GS. This took things back to square one, prompting Hamas to declare that the statement represented a coup against the reconciliation.⁹³

⁸³ Wafa, 6-7/11/2014.

⁸⁴ Alray, 7/11/2014; and PIC, 7/11/2014.

⁸⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 8/11/2014.

⁸⁶ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 14/11/2014.

⁸⁷ *Alquds* newspaper, 15/11/2014.

⁸⁸ *Arabi21*, 16/11/2014.

⁸⁹ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 17/11/2014; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 17/12/2014.

⁹⁰ Felesteen Online, 26/11/2014.

⁹¹ Alray, 8/12/2014.

⁹² PIC, 6/1/2015.

⁹³ Quds Press, 7/1/2015; and Felesteen Online, 7/1/2015.

Efforts for reconciliation resumed in early February 2015, after the PLO factions said they would send a delegation to GS to meet with Hamas. However, according to the PFLP, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad hindered those efforts, where a “lobby” inside the PA moved for obstructing reconciliation and marginalizing the GS.

With the return of media bickering and the emergence of unconfirmed rumors regarding the PLO factions sending a delegation to GS, Salah Bardawil, a Hamas leader, accused President ‘Abbas of obstructing the reconciliation and using the PLO to follow narrow political interests.⁹⁴

Before the end of April 2015, the PFLP circulated a detailed memo to the factions in GS that included ideas and a roadmap for ending the division and restoring Palestinian national unity,⁹⁵ but there was no response from Fatah and Hamas. However, Isma‘il Haniyyah called on Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to renew its efforts to end the division and implement the reconciliation.⁹⁶ This was rejected by Fatah through Muhammad Shtayyeh, Fatah Central Committee member, and Amin Maqboul, Fatah leader. They said the reconciliation dossier did not need new mediation efforts, and that what was required instead was to just implement the agreements between the two sides, accusing Hamas of attempting to neutralize Egypt by bringing in KSA.⁹⁷

While a total impasse prevailed over the reconciliation dossier, Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri sponsored a joint meeting between Fatah and Hamas in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, and proposed an important initiative to push the reconciliation forward, welcomed by both parties.⁹⁸ However, mutual accusations shelved the initiative without any practical results. This was followed by a visit by a government delegation to GS led by Ziad Abu Amr, deputy prime minister, to discuss the issues of crossings and civil servants. No agreement was reached.

With the end of the first year of the National Consensus Government in power by June 2015, controversy over the government and the nature of its lineup returned to the fore. Fatah proposed that Hamas form a new national unity

⁹⁴ Quds Press, 15/4/2015.

⁹⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 30/4/2015.

⁹⁶ Felesteen Online, 1/5/2015.

⁹⁷ *Alghad*, 3/5/2015; *Alittihad* newspaper, Abu Dhabi, 3/5/2015; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 4/5/2015.

⁹⁸ PIC, 7/5/201; Sama News Agency, 10/5/2015, <http://samanews.com/ar/>; and *Annahar* newspaper, Beirut, 9/5/2015.



government to replace it, prompting Hamas to place three conditions: replacing the prime minister, Rami Hamdallah; not adopting a political program that recognizes Israel; and seeking to implement reconciliation agreements including recognizing the rights of the civil servants appointed by the previous Haniyyah government in GS.⁹⁹

Hamas's position evolved into outright rejection and Khalil al-Hayyeh said it would not join any forthcoming government unless the government and its internal consultations become subject to a comprehensive national dialogue without exceptions.¹⁰⁰ However, in the end President 'Abbas ordered Hamdallah to carry out a cabinet reshuffle, which Hamas considered a coup against reconciliation, stressing it would not recognize the legitimacy of any reshuffle made without consulting Hamas.¹⁰¹

The cabinet reshuffle was carried out on 31/7/2015, amid threats by Hamas of not recognizing it and opposition from some Fatah leaders, including 'Azzam al-Ahmad who stated that it was unjustifiable because negotiations for forming a national unity government were ongoing.

Despite the reshuffle, which bypassed Hamas, the movement continued to call for national partnership in all areas, and Khalid Mish'al, head of its political bureau, stressed the importance of democracy and the need to assume national responsibility in light of the challenges facing the Palestinians and Israeli schemes to undermine Palestinian rights.¹⁰²

Faced with Israeli plans that targeted the spatial and temporal division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in September 2015, 'Azzam al-Ahmad announced that he had received a mandate from President 'Abbas to communicate with Hamas to take practical steps towards reconciliation.¹⁰³ At the same time, Usama Hamdan, a Hamas leader, called on President 'Abbas to ensure the unification of Palestinian ranks, stressing that reconciliation would help deter the occupation from dividing *al-Aqsa* Mosque.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ *Al-Hayat*, 24/6/2015.

¹⁰⁰ Site of Alkhaleej Online, 29/6/2015, <http://alkhaleejonline.net>

¹⁰¹ PIC, 1/7/2015; and Alray, 12/7/2015.

¹⁰² *Assabeel* newspaper, Amman, 1/9/2015.

¹⁰³ Site of The New Arab, 16/9/2015, <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/portal>

¹⁰⁴ PIC, 21/9/2015.

It seemed that a new crisis was rearing its head on the internal Palestinian scene, when, on 16/8/2015, the Fatah Central Committee adopted a decision calling for the Palestinian National Council (PNC) to convene. Mahmud ‘Abbas and nine members of the Executive Committee of the PLO submitted their resignations on 22/8/2015. Wassel Abu Yusuf, member of the Executive Committee, claimed there was a legal vacuum and accordingly the PNC was called to hold an emergency session within a month (14–15/9/2015) to elect a new Executive Committee for the PLO.¹⁰⁵ ‘Abbas also appointed Saeb Erekat secretary of the PLO Executive Committee, after dismissing Yasser Abed Rabbo from this post on 30/6/2015.¹⁰⁶

Hamas rejected convening of the PNC in this way, which it considered a violation of all national agreements. It considered Abbas’s insistence a violation of national accords and at odds with national cohesion, seeing it as a re-formation of the PLO in accordance with Abbas’s personal and partisan measurements.¹⁰⁷

The PFLP also refused to participate in the session in question, saying that holding a new session of the PNC, whether it is ordinary or exceptional, would deepen the crisis in the Palestinian arena and further protract the division. The PFLP warned against exploiting the council to pass political projects being hatched in Washington and Europe and to return to the negotiations. However, the PFLP said that its decision not to take part in the PNC session did not equate to a withdrawal from the PLO.¹⁰⁸

For their part, the resistance factions in GS, led by Hamas and PIJ, and including the resistance committees, the PFLP-General Command (GC), the Ahrar movement, the al-Mujahideen, and al-Saiqah movement, called for a boycott of the PNC meeting, saying the session would damage the prospects for national unity. They stressed the decisions made by the meeting would not be binding for the Palestinian people, and would only represent those taking part in it.¹⁰⁹

On a related note, a statement made by 70 deputies demanded the convening of the provisional leadership framework of the PLO in accordance with the reconciliation agreements. The deputies said they did not oppose the principle of participating in the PNC or the PLO bodies based on inclusive consensus, but

¹⁰⁵ Aljazeera.net, 22/8/2015, <http://bit.ly/1ScAXrj>

¹⁰⁶ Site of Arabs 48, 4/7/2015, <http://bit.ly/23qv535>

¹⁰⁷ Site of The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), 2/9/2015, <http://hamas.ps/ar/post/3430/>

¹⁰⁸ Aljazeera.net, 8/9/2015, <http://bit.ly/1VkB5pQ>

¹⁰⁹ Ma’an, 3/9/2015, <https://www.maannews.net/Content.aspx?id=796321>



stressed that they were against taking rushed unilateral measures that would lead to further division.¹¹⁰ Hundreds of academic and independent figures signed another petition calling for postponing the meeting.¹¹¹

Because of the broad objections to the council meeting, President ‘Abbas and the Fatah leadership were forced to withdraw the call for it to convene. On 9/9/2015, PNC Chairman Salim Za‘noun, said the meeting was postponed and launched consultations to hold an ordinary session.¹¹² This was met with relief and was welcomed by the Palestinian factions.¹¹³

The chances to achieve reconciliation appeared to be at their lowest by the end of 2015, despite the climate created by the Jerusalem *Intifadah* to bring about internal Palestinian rapprochement in the face of the occupation. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the possibility of the success of reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah in the next stage, in light of current information, unless a dramatic change were to occur in the internal Palestinian scene that would push reconciliation forward.

Fourth: Palestinian Factional Relations

The tense relations between Hamas and Fatah and the PA received a lot of attention on the Palestinian national scene in 2014 and 2015, and were dominated by regular bickering in the media.

Opinion polls carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research during 2014–2015, reflect the ongoing polarization between Fatah and Hamas. That is, Hamas and Fatah receive around two-thirds of the votes, one-third each. Meanwhile, other factions collectively receive around 11%. There are 20–23%, who have not decided on their allegiance—usually most of their votes are distributed between Fatah and Hamas. It was notable that Hamas latterly was the more popular party in the WB, while Fatah were more popular in GS. It was also notable that, should presidential elections take place, there would be a decline in the popularity of President ‘Abbas, versus that of Isma‘il Haniyyah, Hamas’s candidate. Haniyyah would receive 51% of the vote while ‘Abbas would receive 41%, according to a December 2015 poll.

¹¹⁰ Aljazeera.net, 8/9/2015.

¹¹¹ Aljazeera.net, 9/9/2015, <http://bit.ly/1UXprk9>

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ See for example: Aljazeera.net, 9/9/2015, <http://bit.ly/1qkL2Gb>

Such polls emphasize the improbability of one party eliminating or marginalizing the other, and the necessity to accommodate all factions and respect their audiences. They also confirm the increase in frustration regarding the Oslo Accords, PA performance, and the security coordination, in addition to the increase in support for the armed uprising. All of this constitutes a mandate for the factions and the PA to carry out an overall revision of the Palestinian experience in light of the Oslo Accords, and to reach resolutions that enforce the spirit of resistance and preserve the fundamentals.

In early 2014, Hamas accused Fatah of attempting to eliminate it from the political scene, simultaneously denying having approved delegating President ‘Abbas to agree to the two-state solution.¹¹⁴ The return of three Fatah leaders to GS who had left when Hamas tried to take control over GS in 2007, Majed Abou Shamla, ‘Alaa Yaghi, and Sufyan Abou Zaydah, in addition to ‘Azzam al-Ahmad’s attempt to appoint Rashid Ghannushi, leader of the Tunisian Ennahda Movement (Renaissance Movement), as mediator between Fatah and Hamas, did not contribute to the conclusion of the estrangement or closer relations between the two movements.¹¹⁵

Hamas accused Fatah of inciting Egypt against it. Meanwhile, Fatah Spokesperson Usama al-Qawasmi said that Hamas and the Muslim Brothers (MB) movement had been planning to resolve the problem of the refugees in Sinai by establishing a state for the Palestinian refugees in GS, extending over 60 thousand km to Sinai. GS national and Islamist factions assured that Hamas is part of the national Palestinian movement, denying any external role for Hamas in Egypt.¹¹⁶

When tensions escalated between Hamas and Fatah, Hamas-PIJ relations took a positive turn and the latter’s Secretary General, Ramadan ‘Abdullah, confirmed that the two factions were partners in war and peace. He made those statements two days after the Israeli attacks on the GS.¹¹⁷

Hamas and Fatah’s hostile standoff continued, along with the factions’ reactions to them, until early June 2014 when the National Consensus Government was

¹¹⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 5/1/2015; and PIC, 27/1/2014.

¹¹⁵ Quds Press, 20/2/2014.

¹¹⁶ Aljazeera.net, 2/3/2014, <http://bit.ly/1Xsc9tE>; site of Alwafd, 2/3/2014, <http://bit.ly/1UXpBI5>; and Ma’an, 5/3/2014, <http://www.maannnews.net/Content.aspx?id=678967>

¹¹⁷ *Alghad*, 14/3/2014; and *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, al-Shariqa, 14/3/2014.



formed. A wave of optimism followed, which was soon dissipated due to recurring reciprocal disagreements between the two parties. Fatah firmly responded to Hamas's accusations that Abbas's positions do not represent the whole Palestinian people, stating that Hamas's positions never reflected those of the Palestinian people.¹¹⁸ The peak of the ill feeling came in late June 2014 when Musa Abu Marzuq warned that Hamas might be obliged to run GS, as the authority was marginalizing GS and its residents.¹¹⁹

Tensions escalated between Hamas and Fatah as a result of President Abbas's statements in which he described the resistance "as a war business," during the early days of the Israeli war on GS in July 2014. Statements by Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki, stating that Israel had the right to defend itself, as long as rockets were launched from GS, provoked Abu Marzuq to describe him as Netanyahu's foreign minister.¹²⁰ Tensions reached a climax when Fatah asked Hamas to suspend their membership in the MB movement. Meanwhile, Security Forces Spokesman Adnan al-Damiri, accused Hamas of targeting Fatah members in GS during the war. Fatah Central Committee member Sultan Abu al-'Aynayn accused Hamas of taking control over the Strip.¹²¹

There were several unsuccessful proposals, such as forming a Fatah committee for discussing the future of the relationship with Hamas, in addition to other suggestions by Khalid Mish'al aimed at ending the internal Palestinian deadlock and the ongoing tension between the two, following the September 2014 war. Media bickering continued, despite other factions' efforts at supporting reconciliation.

The stalemate motivated PIJ Secretary General Ramadan to call, on 23/10/2014, for genuine reformation in all Palestinian institutions, for the sake of saving the Palestinian situation. No parties took interest in this proposition, and according to 'Azzam al-Ahmad, Fatah expressed its support for the Egyptian arrangement which called for establishing a buffer zone on GS borders.¹²²

¹¹⁸ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 20/6/2014.

¹¹⁹ PIC, 29/6/2014.

¹²⁰ PIC, 11/7/2014; and official page of Musa Abu Marzuq, site of Facebook, 11/7/2014, <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/mousa.abumarzook>

¹²¹ *Alarab Alyawm* newspaper, Amman, 18/8/2014 and 2/9/2014; Aljazeera.net, 19/8/2014; and PIC, 19/8/2014.

¹²² *Al-Sharq* newspaper, Doha, 28/10/2014.

A slight hope appeared when a delegation from the National Consensus Government planned a visit to GS to resolve the ongoing problems in early November 2014. However, any hope was completely abolished following bombings that targeted the homes of Fatah leaders and a ceremonial stage set up to commemorate the death anniversary of President Yasir ‘Arafat. Accusations escalated to the degree of holding Hamas accountable for the explosions, accusing it of enforcing its security control and its separatist domination over GS.¹²³ This caused overall frustration for the factions, where DFLP Secretary General Nayef Hawatmeh condemned the positions of Fatah and Hamas, and called on the Palestinian leadership to fix its social and political policies.¹²⁴ Further to that, the PFLP accused the unity government of marginalizing GS, and Rabah Muhanna, a member of the PFLP political bureau, added that President ‘Abbas no longer wanted GS.¹²⁵

By the end of 2014, six main Palestinian factions (Hamas, PIJ, PFLP, DFLP, PFLP-GC and al-Saiqah movement) rejected the UN Security Council Resolution regarding ending the occupation, believing that it undermines the Palestinians’ rights and fundamentals.¹²⁶

New rounds of media bickering between Hamas and Fatah happened during the first few weeks of 2015, where ‘Azzam al-Ahmad called for GS to be considered a rebellious region.¹²⁷ In return, Salah Bardawil confirmed that the movement held documents proving the involvement of the PA in the killings of dozens of Gazans by providing the occupation forces with intelligence during the war.¹²⁸ This provoked Fatah to once again accuse Hamas of keeping its alliance with the MB movement, for which Bardawil confirmed that Fatah and the PA were providing false information to the Egyptian intelligence, inciting it against Hamas and Gazans.¹²⁹

At the end of February 2015, Fatah and the rest of the factions supported Hamas against an Egyptian court resolution aiming to classify it as a “terrorist movement.” Fatah Central Committee member Jamal Muheisen rejected the Egyptian court

¹²³ *Asharq Alawsat*, 9/11/2014; and Ma‘an, 1/12/2014.

¹²⁴ Site of Amad, 2/12/2014, <http://www.amad.ps/ar>

¹²⁵ Felesteen Online, 6/12/2014; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 30/12/2014.

¹²⁶ PIC, 30/12/2014.

¹²⁷ *Almustaqbal* newspaper, Beirut, 29/1/2015.

¹²⁸ Felesteen Online, 3/2/2015.

¹²⁹ Quds Press, 3/2/2015.



resolution, as did the PIJ and PFLP.¹³⁰ In an attempt to build bridges between Hamas and the Egyptian authorities, a PIJ delegation, headed by Ramadan ‘Abdullah, paid a visit to Cairo, where they discussed with Egyptian officials the crisis with Hamas, the faltering reconciliation and the Rafah border crossing. The results of the visit were not revealed.¹³¹

The PCC resolutions in early March 2015, which called for halting the security coordination and reconsidering other agreements with the occupation forces, constituted a new point of disagreement between the authority and the Palestinian factions. The factions and the public welcomed this resolution, but the possibility of implementing it was unclear. Therefore, Hamas questioned the seriousness of the Palestinian leadership in implementing the resolution.¹³² ‘Abbas has not implemented the resolution up to the time of writing.

Hamas and Fatah resumed their media bickering, when the Ministry of Interior in the former Gaza government accused PA security forces in Ramallah of being involved in bombings that took place in GS. This was considered by Fatah as an attempt by Hamas to deflect attention from its internal crises.¹³³ In response to statements by President ‘Abbas and one of his advisors calling for a “Decisive Storm” against GS in late March 2015, a reference to the Gulf alliance against Yemeni Houthis, the PIJ condemned these statements, which call for Arab intervention against GS. Musa Abu Marzuq launched scathing criticism against the PA leadership.¹³⁴

In early April 2015, Hamas, PFLP and DFLP welcomed the PA decision to join the ICC, and they called for expediting the submission of files for the sake of prosecuting leaders of the occupation forces for their crimes against the Palestinian people.¹³⁵

By mid-2015, relations between Hamas and Fatah had taken a sharp turn to the worse when President ‘Abbas accused Hamas of holding secret discussions with Israel via an Ethiopian mediator. These accusations were denied by Hamas, who described them as silly.¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Felesteen Online, 28/2/2015.

¹³¹ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 14/11/2014.

¹³² PIC, 6/3/2015; and *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 7/3/2015.

¹³³ *Al-Hayat*, 3/5/2015.

¹³⁴ Felesteen Online, 28/3/2015.

¹³⁵ Aljazeera.net, 21/5/2015.

¹³⁶ *Al-Khaleej*, 2/4/2015; and *al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 2/4/2015.

The French called for re-launching the peace process, setting standards for the Palestinian state within an unspecified duration. Hamas, PFLP and DFLP warned against the risks of this resolution seeing it as a detour away from Palestinian rights and fundamentals.¹³⁷

The relationship between the two parties became worse still when the PA arrested dozens of Hamas members in the WB on 3/7/2015. This was regarded by Hamas as an attempt to weaken the movement and the resistance for the benefit of the occupation's security.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, the resistance factions confirmed that these arrests only serviced the occupation.¹³⁹ In response to Hamas's accusation, Fatah Spokesperson Usama al-Qawasmi accused the movement of negotiating with occupation leaders and the extreme Israeli rightwing regarding separating GS from the WB.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, Khalid Mish'al revealed that Hamas had held meetings with European and international parties for the sake of accelerating efforts of rebuilding the Strip, denying that any efforts for a long-term armistice with the occupation forces had been made.¹⁴¹

In mid-August 2015, Fatah once again accused Hamas of holding negotiations with Israel via the Quartet's Special Envoy to the Middle East Tony Blair, claiming that such a step would entrench the division and the separation of GS from the WB. Fatah considered it a deviation from Palestinian legitimacy represented by the PLO.¹⁴² However, Isma'il Haniyyah considered Fatah's stance to be an attempt to distort Hamas's efforts, confirming that Hamas rejected the idea of the formation of a state in GS and saying that its compass will remain directed towards Jerusalem and all of Palestine.¹⁴³

However, with the Israeli government's hastened implementation of its plan for dividing *al-Aqsa* Mosque temporally and spatially, and the expansion of the Palestinian popular resistance operations in response, Isma'il Haniyyah declared in late September 2015 that *al-Aqsa* battle, liberation and reconciliation all required a decision to give the resistance a free hand in the WB and a halt security coordination.¹⁴⁴ This resonated with Fatah Central Committee member 'Abbas

¹³⁷ *Alghad*, 21 and 30/6/2015; and Felesteen Online, 22/6/2015.

¹³⁸ PIC, 3 and 6/7/2015; Alray, 3/7/2015; and *al-Hayat*, 4/7/2015.

¹³⁹ Quds Press, 4/7/2015.

¹⁴⁰ WAFA, 6/7/2015.

¹⁴¹ *Al-Sharq*, 8/7/2015.

¹⁴² WAFA, 16/8/2015.

¹⁴³ Site of Hamas, 17/8/2015.

¹⁴⁴ Alray, 25/9/2015.



Zaki who called for rebutting the Oslo Accords, which he described as ominous, and the reconciliation process, which he described as a failure, and called for a new strategy suitable for the new stage.¹⁴⁵

At the end of September 2015, President ‘Abbas delivered a speech in UN General Assembly, in which he declared that the PA could not continue to be bound by all political, security and economic agreements with Israel, citing the refusal of all Israeli governments to abide by the them. This was seen by Fatah and the PLO as the beginning of a new phase in the history of the Palestinian issue. Meanwhile, a number of the factions did not see it as a serious threat, and considered it to have fallen short of their hopes and expectations.

When the Jerusalem *Intifadah* began in early October 2015, Fatah called for the preservation of its popular nature, warning Israel against compromising the historical status of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Meanwhile, the PFLP called for the formation of a united leadership for the battle against the occupation. Hamas called on the PA to halt security coordination and to provide cover for the resistance in the WB, in addition to agreeing on a unified national strategy for preserving the *Intifadah*, and for combining political and field action.¹⁴⁶

On 16/11/2015, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad announced an agreement between the PA and the Egyptian authorities for reopening the Rafah border crossing.¹⁴⁷ Hamas said that it was not part of that agreement but it concurrently expressed its willingness to deal with any positive suggestion for opening the crossing.¹⁴⁸ But official Egyptian sources denied reaching any agreement concerning the crossing, which some attributed to the interferences of Muhammad Dahlan that led to the thwarting of the supposed agreement at the last minute.

When Hamas and its affiliated ministries in GS expressed their intention to distribute government land to employees as a substitute for their financial dues, Fatah, other factions and civil society organizations launched an attack against this step. Fatah saw it as a crime, while the factions saw it as an entrenchment of the division.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ *Alquds*, 27/9/2015.

¹⁴⁶ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 8/10/2015; *Raialyoum* newspaper, London, 8/10/2015; Wafa, 21/10/2015; and site of Hamas, 4/11/2015.

¹⁴⁷ *Al-Hayat*, 17/11/2015.

¹⁴⁸ Site of Hamas, 18/11/2015.

¹⁴⁹ *Alquds*, 21/11/2015; and *al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 24/11/2015.

Thus, the PA-factions relationships have been characterized with constant disagreement and tensions, with Hamas on one side, and Fatah and the PA on the other. Therefore, the continuation of this pattern in the coming phase is predictable.

The internal organizational dynamics of Fatah witnessed some troubles throughout 2014 and 2015. The higher leadership commission of Fatah in GS resigned in late January 2014 in protest over what it saw as its disabling. This pushed Fatah's Central Committee to send a delegation to the Strip for the purpose of straightening out the movement's internal situation.¹⁵⁰ Dozens of Fatah cadres submitted their resignations in late February 2014, under the pretext of the faulty appointment policy within the movement.

In parallel, internal disagreements increased within Fatah between President 'Abbas and his supporters and the dismissed movement leader Muhammad Dahlan. That is, 'Abbas dismissed a number of Dahlan's followers from Fatah¹⁵¹ which provoked a media standoff between the two parties, the highlight of which was Dahlan's call for forming a unified Palestinian front for resisting Abbas's behavior.¹⁵²

Further to that, Fatah concluded its internal elections in most of its regions, inside and outside of the WB, in light of obvious problems that interrupted the election procedures in the different GS regions, as a result of the pervasive conflict between supporters of 'Abbas and those of Dahlan. And despite the official Egyptian effort which attempted to approximate the positions of Dahlan and 'Abbas and to reconcile them, especially in late 2014 and 2015, it was fruitless because of Abbas's opposing stands where he appeared unwilling to yield or to be flexible. And in mid-November 2015, Fatah's Central Committee ratified recommendations presented by members of the preparatory committee for the movement's seventh conference calling for postponing the conference indefinitely due to the ongoing internal conflicts and the rise in Dahlan's popularity.¹⁵³

Fatah can expect to experience relative organizational stability in the WB, and will struggle with internal organizational instability in GS, if the intense disagreement between 'Abbas and Dahlan is not resolved.

¹⁵⁰ *Alquds*, 1/2/2014; and *al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 8/2/2014.

¹⁵¹ Wafa, 31/5/2014.

¹⁵² Safa, 30/12/2014.

¹⁵³ *Raialyoum*, 15/11/2015.



At the time of writing, the PIJ financial crisis began to loom in the horizon following the shutting down of the “Palestine Today” satellite channel offices in occupied Jerusalem, which were managed by the movement from outside of Palestine.¹⁵⁴ It seems that this crisis was a result of disagreements between PIJ and Iran, where Iran was not happy with the movement's commitment to a policy of neutrality and non-interference in the affairs of any Arab country, and was not supporting the Iranian position in Syria, Yemen and other countries. Iran has considerably reduced its financial support to PIJ, which has made it very difficult for the movement to pay its employees and to have an operational budget for its institutions.¹⁵⁵

One of the negative aspects of these deteriorating bilateral relations was the establishment of Al-Sabireen Movement for Supporting Palestine (HESN) by the PIJ dissenter Hisham Salem in 2014 in GS. It is a Palestinian movement that is more aligned with Iranian positions and agendas.¹⁵⁶ This movement was not well received by Hamas who dealt with it cautiously. Many Palestinian parties were worried about the movement, out of fear that it might be a gateway for Iranian power or for spreading “Shi’ism” in the Strip. On 13/3/2016, GS Authorities shut down the “Al-Baqiyat al-Salihat” organization, which is a front of Al-Sabireen, alleging that it was practicing politics while its license was related solely to charitable work.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, Abu Ahmad Fu’ad was elected in January 2014 as PFLP Secretary General, succeeding ‘Abdul Rahman Mlouh who had resigned from PFLP’s leadership councils during the 7th General Conference. Secretary General Ahmad Sa‘dat was chosen, along with his deputy and members of the PFLP leadership council locally and in the Diaspora.¹⁵⁸

The central committee of the DFLP held its fourth session, headed by its Secretary General Nayef Hawatmeh in February 2014, during which it discussed a number of political developments witnessed on the Palestinian scene, in light of pressure from the US administration and ongoing settlement building. The front also discussed organizational reports presented by several leadership bodies and

¹⁵⁴ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18/5/2015.

¹⁵⁵ Alkhaleej Online, 10/1/2016, <http://bit.ly/1SuYlu6>

¹⁵⁶ Arabi21, 14/3/2016.

¹⁵⁷ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 14/3/2016.

¹⁵⁸ *Alquds*, 17/1/2014, <http://www.alquds.com/news/article/view/id/483736>

consequently took some necessary decisions. At the end of the conference, it issued the National Political Announcement.¹⁵⁹ On the 45th anniversary of DFLP, on 22/2/2014, Nayef Hawatmeh issued a statement to the Palestinian people, in which he called on Mahmud ‘Abbas and all Palestinian factions to reject the American framework agreement. He also called on Isma‘il Haniyyah and on the PA government to resign and to form a National Consensus Government immediately.¹⁶⁰

In August 2015, DFLP held its 7th General Conference in the North Gaza governorate. Several decisions were made, on the political, social and democratic levels. The conference approved the required organizational forms for bolstering public pressure, and finding solutions for communities affected by the aggression and the division, in a manner that would reinforce resilience and confrontation of the aggression, the siege and the policies aimed at isolating the Palestinians. Also, 30 delegates were elected to represent all operating sectors.¹⁶¹

Fifth: Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination and its Repercussions on the Internal Palestinian Situation

It is not controversial to state that security coordination between Israeli and PA security forces constitutes the biggest obstacle for achieving internal Palestinian reconciliation and harmony. That is, security coordination produced grudges and hatred among factions and eroded the Palestinian social fabric. This coordination did not stop throughout 2014 and 2015, in fact it expanded, according to Israeli sources, despite the Jerusalem *Intifadah* erupting in late 2015. In 2014 and 2015, several Israeli settlers entered the PA regions, where the security forces handed them over to the Israeli army.

A governmental report issued by the information center in the Ministry of Planning documented the ongoing arrests and summoning of Hamas, PIJ and other faction members by the PA security forces in the WB. In addition to that, the PA held dozens of security meetings with Israeli security forces.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 14/2/2014, <http://www.alhayat-j.com/newsite/details.php?opt=3&id=228351&cid=3212>

¹⁶⁰ Al Hourriah online magazine, 23/2/2014, <http://bit.ly/1RQrBj6>

¹⁶¹ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 17/8/2015, http://www.al-ayyam.ps/ar_page.php?id=fb4e5c5y263513541Yfb4e5c5

¹⁶² PIC, 21/1/2014.



An important indicator of the extent of the security coordination was Abbas's pledge in May 2014 to continue coordinating with Israel whether negotiations resumed or not. He confirmed that security coordination was sacred and it would continue.¹⁶³

As for Hamas, it called on the PA to immediately halt security coordination and security meetings with the occupation, and to condemn its frenzied arrests of Palestinian leaders and public figures. These included the PLC speaker and many MPs and political leaders.¹⁶⁴

But security relations with Israel took a detour when three Israeli settlers were kidnapped on 12/6/2014 close to Hebron in the WB. President 'Abbas pledged to help find the three settlers and to return them to their families and prosecute the kidnappers. He also confirmed that the PA would coordinate with Israel, expressing his belief that security coordination was in the best interests of the authority, aiming to protect the Palestinian people.¹⁶⁵

In an interview with an Israeli newspaper, President 'Abbas said that, since early 2013 and up to June 2014, the PA security forces had managed to thwart at least 43 attempts to target Israelis, constituting an important indicator.¹⁶⁶

When the Israeli war on GS started on 8/7/2014, PLO factions called on the Executive Committee to halt security coordination.¹⁶⁷ However, that did not happen; security meetings continued, without giving any consideration to the massacre of civilians and the massive destruction caused by the aggression on the Strip.

When Israeli media and political circles launched an attack against President 'Abbas following the assassination attempt against Israeli rabbi Yehuda Glick and some stabbings and assaults using vehicles executed by Palestinians, Israeli security officials confirmed that President 'Abbas sanctifies security coordination by word and deed. They added that 'Abbas's security forces were committed to implementing security agreements with Israel, and that he was coordinating against Hamas and the Palestinian resistance. In addition to that, PA security

¹⁶³ *Asharq Alawsat*, 29/5/2014.

¹⁶⁴ Quds Press, 16/6/2014.

¹⁶⁵ *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 19/6/2014.

¹⁶⁶ *Raialyoum*, 22/6/2014.

¹⁶⁷ Quds Press, 12/7/2014.

officials in the authority reaffirmed their commitment to security agreements with Israel.¹⁶⁸

In 2015, security coordination continued. However, the major political event on the Palestinian scene was the PCC resolution. During a meeting on 5/3/2015, the council decided to “halt all forms of security coordination with Israeli occupation in light of its failure to abide by agreements signed between the two sides.”¹⁶⁹ Council members gave a standing ovation for this resolution, which had not been implemented at the time of the writing this report. It was not surprising that Israel did not pay much attention to such a resolution and that it was certain that it would not be implemented, in light of confirmations from sources close to President ‘Abbas that the halting of the security coordination was merely a recommendation, and that it would only be implemented via a presidential decree, a highly unlikely outcome.¹⁷⁰

Former Ambassador Uri Savir revealed that negotiations were held between Israeli and Palestinian security authorities to confront the Palestinian uprising. Maariv newspaper confirmed that 140 security meetings were convened in 2015.¹⁷¹ Israeli website Walla, published a report on security coordination between the PA and Israel. It mentioned that in 2015, the PA returned 634 Israelis, who had entered WB territories, while in 2014 it returned 622.¹⁷²

As part of the security coordination, the PA launched a crackdown against Hamas militants in the WB. Israeli intelligence circles confirmed that this crackdown was coordinated with the Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*), which tracks financial cells that pay money and benefits to Hamas families and detainees. This served as confirmation of the security partnership between the two sides and the ongoing security coordination between them.¹⁷³

As a result of this steady coordination, security in Israeli settlements in the WB improved. Israeli sources related this to security stability in the WB, which is the result of the alternation of roles between the Israeli and Palestinian security

¹⁶⁸ Awraqq News Network, 24/8/2014, <http://www.awraqq.com>; Felesteen Online, 8 and 29/11/2014; Arabi21, 12 and 17/11/2014; and Arabs 48, 12/11/2014.

¹⁶⁹ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 6/3/2015.

¹⁷⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 7/3/2015; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 9/3/2015.

¹⁷¹ Aljazeera.net, 31/3/2016, <http://bit.ly/1qQykj2>

¹⁷² Quds Press, 31/3/2016.

¹⁷³ *Al-Taqrir al-Ma‘lumaty*, no. 3323, Studies and Media Information Analysis Center, 12/5/2015. (in Arabic)



forces.¹⁷⁴ The coordination provoked some Palestinian factions and the PFLP escalated its stand against it, similar to that of Hamas and PIJ. PFLP Political Bureau Member Rabah Mhanna addressed President ‘Abbas and the PA security in the WB, saying: “Aren’t you ashamed of the ongoing security coordination with the occupation despite its continuous crimes against our people?” He added: “Don’t you see that the ongoing measures taken by the occupation against our people is a reason for halting the abominable security coordination?!”¹⁷⁵

Following the crime of the burning of the Dawabsheh family in Nablus in early August 2015, Palestinian parties and factions called for revenge and activating the resistance against settlers in the WB. Fatah Central Committee member Jibril Rajoub affirmed his rejection of committing attacks against Israeli targets, to avenge the Dawabsheh family. He also confirmed that the PA would continue to fight anybody who attempted to thwart its political agendas, in reference to the resistance operations.¹⁷⁶

A senior officer of the Israeli army (who remained anonymous) gave a statement to the Israeli website Walla, in which he confirmed that President ‘Abbas was preventing an *Intifadah* through security coordination, despite the daily confrontations in the WB. His statement can be seen as an accurate summary of the PA’s security approach.¹⁷⁷

With the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in early October 2015, Israeli Knesset Member (MK) Ksenia Svetlova visited Ramallah and met with senior PA security leaders, who confirmed their commitment to ongoing security coordination and that the PA security was working hard against all those who sought to compromise Israel’s security.¹⁷⁸ Amidst the *Intifadah* events and calls from Palestinian factions to the PA to halt security coordination, Maariv newspaper published a report in which President ‘Abbas confirmed that he was the protector of the security coordination and a fighter of “terrorism.”¹⁷⁹

Further to that, on 17/11/2015, the Hebrew language newspaper, Yedioth Ahronoth published the story of Jenin Governor Ibrahim Ramadan confirming that

¹⁷⁴ Site of Watan Yugarred Kharij al-Serb, 24/5/2015, <http://www.watanserb.com>

¹⁷⁵ Alray, 4/6/2015.

¹⁷⁶ PIC, 4/8/2015.

¹⁷⁷ Arabs 48, 9/8/2015.

¹⁷⁸ The Arabic site of Israel Broadcasting Authority—IBA (Arabil), 8/10/2015.

¹⁷⁹ Arabi21, 5/11/2015.

the PA security forces had prevented three stabbings that would have targeted Israeli soldiers at al-Jalama checkpoint north of Jenin over a period of two weeks (the first half of November 2015).¹⁸⁰

Despite the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* and its broad support from the Palestinian people that put major pressure on the PA, the latter attempted to confine its parameters, keeping it manageable in order to benefit from it politically, according to the PA's agenda. Therefore, the PA insisted on maintenance of security coordination, despite overwhelming Palestinian public objections.

In this context, the head of Palestinian Intelligence, Major General Majid Faraj gave a statement to the American weekly *Defense News* published on 18/1/2016 saying that "since October, PA intelligence and security forces have prevented 200 attacks against Israelis, confiscated weapons and arrested about 100 Palestinians." In the interview, "Faraj views security coordination as a bridge that can sustain a decent atmosphere until the politicians go back to serious talks." Faraj reconfirmed the importance of maintaining the security coordination between the authority and the Israeli army, adding that "We are sure that violence, radicalization and terrorism will hurt us. It won't bring us closer to achieving our dream of a Palestinian state."¹⁸¹

In a sign of support for the head of the Palestinian intelligence, President 'Abbas stepped forward to defend the security coordination policy, emphasizing that this commitment was irreversible, one of the major pledges of the Oslo Accords. During a meeting with the Israeli media in Ramallah on 21/1/2016, 'Abbas said that he supported peaceful popular resistance and was against all forms of extremism.¹⁸² On 23/1/2016, he confirmed that security coordination with the Israeli side was still ongoing. "Our security forces prevent any citizen from executing any operation." He added that "We will not accept that our children throw rocks at the Israeli army and then get killed. The Palestinian security forces prevents that for their own protection, out of orders from me personally." 'Abbas clarified that the "security coordination is still ongoing till now. But I don't know what will happen later. We are doing our job to the fullest. And I refuse to be dragged into a battle that I don't want. I don't want to go into a military battle that

¹⁸⁰ PIC, 17/11/2015.

¹⁸¹ Keeping ISIS Out of Palestine, site of Defense News, 18/1/2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/mideast-africa/2016/01/18/keeping-isis-out-palestine/78939962/>

¹⁸² WAFA, 21/1/2016.



I cannot handle. And I don't want my people to have a bleak fate." 'Abbas went on to say that "If Israel does not adhere to the agreements, we won't adhere to them either."¹⁸³

The statements of 'Abbas and Faraj reveal the extent of security coordination, and the real political position they take concerning its potential cessation. They confirmed the disregard of the PA leadership for the implementation of the PCC resolution for halting security coordination. Further to that, these statements refuted published reports regarding statements by Saeb Erekat, secretary of the PLO Executive Committee and member of Fatah's Central Committee, claiming that the PA would start to officially cut its ties with Israel in early 2016, including security coordination.¹⁸⁴

Security coordination with Israel was enhanced further in December 2015. "The Committee of the Families of Political Detainees in the West Bank recorded 265 violations by PA security forces against resistance members and cadres, especially those belonging to Hamas."¹⁸⁵ On 7/1/2016, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, quoting an Israeli security report which said that:

The PA has markedly reduced the anti-Israel incitement on its official media outlets, deployed uniformed security personnel at flashpoints in the West Bank to prevent confrontations with Israeli soldiers and resumed arresting Hamas military activists. In parallel, Fatah members 'stopped attending demonstrations,' as 'significant improvement in security coordination' was noted, which 'one source called 'exceptionally good' in recent weeks.'

The paper added that Israeli authorities arrested a Hamas network comprising 25 activists.¹⁸⁶

Israeli authorities were keen to stress the impotence of the security coordination with the PA and on its efficiency in preventing or at least stalling operations against Israel and the settlers in the WB. An Israeli military report confirmed that Israeli-Palestinian security coordination was considered a fundamental building block in their relations, preventing the escalation of confrontations with Palestinians in the

¹⁸³ Site of Anadolu Agency, 23/1/2016, <http://aa.com.tr/ar>

¹⁸⁴ *Alittihad*, 21/12/2015.

¹⁸⁵ Mohsen Moh'd Saleh, Political Opinion: The Orphaned *Intifadah!*, site of al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 9/2/2016, <http://eng.alzaytouna.net/2016/02/09/political-opinion-the-orphaned-intifadah/>

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

WB.¹⁸⁷ Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said that the PA security forces continued to coordinate with the Israeli army. He added that this coordination and cooperation was helping the army put an end to the Jerusalem *Intifadah*.¹⁸⁸

Sixth: The Repercussions of the Israeli Aggression on GS in the Summer of 2014 on the Internal Palestinian Situation

The Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 turned tens of thousands into homeless people amid the huge destruction of homes and properties. While the assaults of 2008–2009 and 2012 were also devastating, the assault of 2014 proved to be the most brutal and violent. As a result, GS reconstruction became the most important issue for its residents after the war ended. There followed great disappointment as a result of the stumbling efforts at reconstruction. (See Section 3 of Chapter Two entitled War on GS)

Efforts for reconstruction began during the indirect ceasefire talks in Cairo on 11/8/2014. Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a national commission led by President 'Abbas to handle reconstruction, provided that it would be acceptable to Palestinian, Arab, and international parties.¹⁸⁹ Less than a month after the assault, the National Consensus Government formed a ministerial committee to oversee preparations for reconstruction in GS and a donor conference.¹⁹⁰ Minister of Housing and Public Works Mufeed Al-Hassayna, said GS was a disaster zone with losses of \$6–8 billion. The number of housing units full destroyed or rendered uninhabitable in GS was nearly 20 thousand, in addition to 40 thousand that were moderately or slightly damaged, including 180 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools.¹⁹¹

As soon as the assault stopped, Khalil al-Hayyeh, a Hamas leader stated that the National Consensus Government was responsible for rebuilding GS, expressing his movement's willingness to back and support the government.¹⁹² Ramadan 'Abdullah warned against complacency in the reconstruction dossier, stressing that the Palestinian people would not tolerate anyone who fails to fulfill the

¹⁸⁷ *Raialyoum*, 27/1/2016.

¹⁸⁸ *Al-Akhbar*, 2/2/2016.

¹⁸⁹ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 12/8/2014.

¹⁹⁰ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 6/8/2014.

¹⁹¹ Alray, 7/8/2014; and Paltoday News Agency, 18/8/2014, <http://paltoday.ps/ar/>

¹⁹² *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 30/8/2014.



commitments in this regard.¹⁹³ Hamas leaders emphasized their rejection of any trade-off between reconstruction and resistance under any circumstances.

Amid the growing tragedy in GS as a result of the assault, Musa Abu Marzuq called on the PA to begin reconstruction without waiting for the donor conference scheduled for October 2014 and the arrival of funds to its treasury.¹⁹⁴ At a time when KSA pledged \$500 million for the GS reconstruction,¹⁹⁵ the National Consensus Government published its GS reconstruction national plan to the tune of approximately \$4 billion.¹⁹⁶ This was followed by a visit to GS by a government delegation on 9/10/2014, convening with its full lineup for the first time in GS. Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah promised to rebuild GS, explaining that his government would submit complete, detailed plans to the donor conference in Cairo.¹⁹⁷ However, by the end of October 2014, frustration prevailed amid statements by Hamdallah saying the government had not received “a single penny” of the funds pledged by the donor countries.¹⁹⁸

When UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry declared his plan for the reconstruction of GS in early November 2014, there were reports that Abu Marzuq was in favor of it. The latter denied his approval of a plan which placed an Israeli veto on the beneficiaries of reconstruction. Other factions called for it to be replaced or rectified.

At the end of November, Abu Marzuq said Robert Serry modified his plan to make it more acceptable to the Palestinian side, stressing that Hamas had many options if the parties concerned failed to fulfill their role in the reconstruction process.¹⁹⁹ By the end of 2014, Abu Marzuq reiterated his group’s rejection of Serry’s plan, pointing out that there was a preference to form a national body to oversee the reconstruction process,²⁰⁰ but this was never implemented.

Robert Serry’s plan included a truce between Israel and the Palestinian factions for five years, under the umbrella of the National Consensus Government, during which time the GS blockade would be fully lifted, reconstruction would take place, as the military activities of the resistance above ground and underground would be

¹⁹³ *Assafir*, 9/9/2014.

¹⁹⁴ Site of Filastin Alaam, 15/9/2014, <http://paltimes.net/>; and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/9/2014.

¹⁹⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 19/9/2014.

¹⁹⁶ *Alray*, 9/10/2014.

¹⁹⁷ *Al-Hayat*, 10/10/2014.

¹⁹⁸ *Aljazeera.net*, 28/10/2014.

¹⁹⁹ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 27/11/2014.

²⁰⁰ *PIC*, 28/12/2014.

suspended. Interestingly, however, Serry did not propose his project until near the end of his term, suggesting it was less credible and serious.

The Quartet's Special Envoy to the Middle East Tony Blair, (2007–2015), meanwhile, also made appearances shortly before the end of his term, talking about the need to put an end to the suffering of GS, and after visiting the Strip, declared he was keen to see the situation change. The broad outlines of his plan included Israeli 'concessions' and he talked about opening the crossings. The special envoy also stressed that Palestinian unity would encourage the peace process. He resumed his activities, meeting with Mish'al, stressing the need to lift the GS blockade, and the need for Hamas not to be bypassed. Blair even talked about his conviction that the European nations should deal publicly and directly with the movement.²⁰¹

Regardless of the initiatives of Blair and Serry, what is certain is that the spring and summer of 2015 witnessed increasing European activity to present an approach acceptable to all sides for ending the siege and beginning reconstruction. Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries were particularly active in this regard, in addition to Blair, who had his own connections in Britain and the US. Qatar and Turkey, sympathetic to Hamas's position and strongly in favor of ending the siege and beginning reconstruction, offered proposals for ending the blockade in return for a long-term truce.²⁰²

Hamas also confirmed that Western parties presented proposals for long-term truce and said it was studying them. Hamas's position, expressed by a number of its leaders and spokespersons, including Isma'il Haniyyah, Musa Abu Marzuq, 'Izzat al-Rishq, Usama Hamdan, Sami Abu Zuhri, Fawzi Barhum, Salah Bardawil, Tahir al-Nunu, and Isma'il Radwan, boiled down to:

1. The need for guarantees that would oblige Israel to lift the siege, end its assaults, and allow reconstruction to proceed.
2. The long-term truce must be secured as part of a national consensus, especially among resistance factions in GS.
3. The truce could not mean allowing Israel free reign in the WB or lead to any form of separation between the WB and GS.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Mohsen Moh'd Saleh, Political Opinion: The Long Term-Truce and Gaza's Separation From the West Bank, al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 23/6/2015, <http://eng.alzaytouna.net/2015/07/30/political-opinion-the-long-term-truce-and-gazas-separation-from-the-west-bank/>

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.



In the early days of 2015, it appeared that the internal Palestinian situation had entered a bottleneck after the deterioration of the relationship between Hamas and the National Consensus Government. It announced that it would not be able to assume its responsibilities towards the reconstruction process unless it was allowed to impose its presence in the GS, including taking over the crossings. This statement was the result of accusations made by the government against Hamas claiming they had disrupted the work of a ministerial delegation from the WB that had come to the GS to discuss some issues, first and foremost the issue of civil servants, who absconded when Hamas took over GS in the summer of 2007.²⁰⁴

In mid-January 2015, the National Consensus Government announced that Qatar had transferred \$15 million to repair partially damaged homes, and to provide aid to persons displaced by the Israeli aggression on GS.²⁰⁵ In light of the tension between Hamas and the National Consensus Government, and the failure of the donor countries to fulfill their pledges for reconstruction, Hamas issued a warning through Deputy PLC Speaker Ahmad Bahar saying the situation in GS is on the verge of exploding.²⁰⁶

The government did not take long to defend itself. Minister of Public Works and Housing Mufid al-Hassayna said on multiple occasions that the total amounts received by the PA for reconstruction did not exceed \$200 million. He also announced the start of a new phase to rebuild destroyed homes, despite the slow flow of donor funds and building materials, stressing that GS needed 130 thousand housing units because of the devastation caused by the aggression.²⁰⁷

On 10/3/2015, Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of National Economy Muhammad Mustafa, who is also chairman of the ministerial committee for the reconstruction of southern governorates, announced that, through a Qatari grant, compensation would be paid to the owners of businesses that suffered slight damage.²⁰⁸ However, Usama Hamdan, a Hamas leader, accused members of the PA and the government of obstructing Qatari efforts to help reconstruction.²⁰⁹ On 28/3/2015, President ‘Abbas accused Hamas of obstructing reconstruction, in a

²⁰⁴ Wafa, 7/1/2015.

²⁰⁵ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 15/1/2015.

²⁰⁶ Felesteen Online, 25/1/2015.

²⁰⁷ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 24/2/2015 and 4/3/2015; and Aljazeera.net, 26/2/2015.

²⁰⁸ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 11/3/2015.

²⁰⁹ Alresalah Press, 19/3/2015.

speech at the League of Arab States Summit in Egypt, but this was dismissed by Hamas.²¹⁰

Based on its desire to speed up the reconstruction process, on 7/4/2015 the government decided to form a committee to arrange for taking over crossings into GS. However, Hamas refused to comply with this, except on the basis of full implementation of the reconciliation accords, which took things back to square one.

On 9/4/2015, Minister al-Hassayna said the reconstruction would need eight thousand tons of cement per day. While, on 12/4/2015, Deputy Economy Minister Hatem ‘Oweida, pointed out that Israel allowed the provision of only 5% of supplies needed for reconstruction. When the government received the Kuwaiti grant for reconstruction worth \$200 million, Rami Hamdallah discussed with the reconstruction committee implementation issues, considering it the responsibility of the government.²¹¹

A full year after the National Consensus Government was formed, it accused Hamas of obstructing its work and reconstruction duties by refusing to hand over ministries and crossings, and allow civil servants to return to their posts.²¹² In June 2015, Minister al-Hassayna announced an agreement regarding the mechanism for bringing in building materials, between the Israeli side and the Palestinian Ministries of Public Works and Housing and of Civil Affairs as well as the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the supervising authority monitoring the reconstruction mechanism. The minister noted that this mechanism was aimed at the owners of totally destroyed homes and new buildings, in addition to new floors.²¹³ Then he declared that Israel had allowed enough material to rebuild 663 housing units that were completely destroyed during the aggression.²¹⁴

By mid-August 2015, al-Hassayna said preparations had begun to disburse the second installment of the Qatari reconstruction grant, after obtaining Israeli approval for procuring building materials.²¹⁵ With the start of the new academic year in early September 2015, all shelters were evacuated of their approximately

²¹⁰ Felesteen Online, 28/3/2015.

²¹¹ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 27/4/2015.

²¹² *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 3/6/2015.

²¹³ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 25/6/2015.

²¹⁴ Anadolu Agency, 7/7/2015.

²¹⁵ Alresalah Press, 17/8/2015.



450 thousand people who had been displaced by the Israeli war that destroyed their homes.

According to PA officials, 560 tons of rubble were removed from various parts of GS. The PA supplied more than 2,200 mobile homes in the areas affected by the Israeli war.²¹⁶ On 26/10/2015, al-Hassayna said Kuwaiti-funded reconstruction projects would begin within weeks to build 2,000 housing units,²¹⁷ while the Ministry estimated the losses of infrastructure in GS at approximately \$3 billion.²¹⁸

On 18/11/2015, the Palestinian government signed a soft loan agreement in support of GS reconstruction with the Italian government worth of €15 million (\$16.7 million), to be repaid over 40 years.²¹⁹ At the same time, Minister al-Hassayna said that up to 90% of partially damaged homes had been repaired.

With the end of November 2015, Deputy Minister of Public Works and Housing Naji Sarhan announced a new, second Qatari grant covering one thousand to two thousand housing units, in addition to new reconstruction grants from Kuwait, KSA, the US, and other states to the UNRWA.

At the end of 2015, reconstruction continued to progress at a slow and limited pace, far below the expectations of the Palestinian government, factions, and people, amid the continuation of the intra-Palestinian division. No significant progress or radical change was expected to take place going forward, unless facts on the ground were to change with the National Consensus Government imposing its authority in GS, which remains under de facto Hamas control at the time of writing.

Conclusion

By analyzing the events of 2014 and 2015, one may conclude that there is now a growing Palestinian awareness of the negative repercussions of the Palestinian division on the internal situation. There are many factors pushing towards a kind of national accord, even at a bare minimum level, with a view to reconfiguring the Palestinian position to face major challenges. These factors are the crippling blockade imposed on GS, and the resulting difficult economic and humanitarian

²¹⁶ WAFA, 2/9/2015.

²¹⁷ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 27/10/2015.

²¹⁸ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 17/11/2015.

²¹⁹ Alray, 18/11/2015.

conditions; Israeli racist settlement and Judaization schemes; the Israeli government's refusal to comply with the bare minimum of Palestinian rights and national aspirations; popular resentment over the division; and the decline of the Palestinian issue internationally.

The experience of the past two years has proven that the Israeli occupation, the US administration, and the international community are complicit in the imposition of the blockade, and have reached the conviction that it is impossible to break the Palestinian popular will and subdue Hamas, which controls GS, and force them to accept international conditions and dictates. This has forced these parties to seek new ways to deal with GS and its people, including proposals to ease the blockade in order to prevent an explosion.

Meanwhile, the scenario whereby the division would continue is plausible, in light of some powerful factors. Hamas's program based on resistance and its rejection of the Oslo Accords, recognition of Israel, and the conditions of the Quartet, is fundamentally contradictory to Fatah's program based on the peace process and resulting commitments. The issue will require a lot of effort to reach a compromise, which determines the priorities of the phase and its political program, and that would maintain core principles while managing differences in an acceptable way, within one institutional framework such as the PLO or the PA. This is a difficult task whose outcome could be the abandonment of the Oslo Accords or altering the function of the PA, entailing huge costs that could be rejected by many who benefit from the status quo.

Making matters more difficult for reconciliation is the fact that Israel can obstruct the work of the government and hinder elections. It can disrupt any development of security forces and other PA agencies in the WB, should Hamas and resistance forces be included as a real partner. Moreover, the regional and international climate remains opposed to Islamist movements and is therefore making real participation of Hamas and PIJ in the rebuilding of the PLO and the PA more difficult, not to mention the deep mistrust between Fatah and Hamas as a result of the long history of conflict and friction.

An opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, in December 2015, showed increasing frustration towards the Oslo Accords; 68% of the respondents in the WB and GS were in favor of abandoning the Oslo Accords, compared to 25% who are against. According to the same poll,



about half of the Palestinians in the WB and GS support the PA's dissolution. There is a wide support for the return of armed uprising (60%), and up to 65% call for the resignation of Mahmud 'Abbas. Only 26% support negotiations. These figures are similar to the ones obtained in previous polls, reflecting a real crisis facing the PA, with regard to the peace process it adheres to and the functional role it has.²²⁰

Therefore, the sincere desire to achieve reconciliation must be accompanied by a confidence-building program with real and serious reviews of Palestinian action. These are essential bases to reach an effective working policy within a unified institutional framework that would preserve fundamentals and continue the liberation project. For this reason, the feasible reconciliation is the one that would preserve the arms of the resistance, end security coordination with Israel in the WB, and turn the PA into a resistance authority that endorses a full *Intifadah* on the basis of which national unity could be secured. Hence, it would be able to repel the occupation, dismantle settlements, end the siege on GS, and secure the release of all prisoners.

²²⁰ Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Palestinian Opinion Poll No. 58, 14/12/2015, <http://www.pcpsr.org/ar/node/626>

التقرير الاستراتيجي الفلسطيني

2015-2014

الفصل الأول

الوضع الفلسطيني الداخلي

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