



## Formation of new Palestinian government

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On 23 April 2014 it was announced that Fatah and Hamas, the two main factions in Palestinian politics, had signed a reconciliation agreement. Subsequently, in June 2014, a unity government was sworn in, made up primarily of technocrats but enjoying the support of both factions. Hamas does not recognise the state of Israel, and Israel suspended its peace talks with the Palestinians in response to the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation. This note provides a brief summary and analysis of these developments.

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## 1 Introduction

On 23 April 2014 it was announced that Fatah and Hamas, the two main factions in Palestinian politics, had signed a reconciliation agreement. Subsequently, in June 2014, a unity government was sworn in, made up primarily of technocrats but enjoying the support of both factions. Hamas does not recognise the state of Israel, and Israel suspended its peace talks with the Palestinians in response to the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation. This note provides a brief summary and analysis of these developments.

## 2 Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs): political background

The West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Gaza) have been under the occupation of Israel since 1967, and are collectively known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). From the beginning of the occupation until the mid-1990s, these territories were under full Israeli control. Following the signing of the Oslo Accords, control of some areas of the OPTs passed to the newly-formed Palestinian Authority.<sup>1</sup>

However, the Oslo Accords were only ever intended to be an interim solution, pending a permanent agreement on the status of the territories.<sup>2</sup> In August 2013, the Government of Israel entered into direct talks with the Palestinians, brokered by John Kerry, the US Secretary of State.<sup>3</sup> The aim of these talks was the creation of a Palestinian state (the so-called “two-state solution”) and the consequent end of the occupation.<sup>4</sup>

## 3 Fatah-Hamas division

The most recent Palestinian Authority legislative elections took place in January 2006, leaving Hamas as the largest party.<sup>5</sup> Hamas refuses to recognise the state of Israel. Following the elections Hamas formed a coalition administration alongside the more moderate (and previously ruling) Fatah.<sup>6</sup> However, in June 2007, tensions between the two parties spilled over into armed conflict. Hamas seized control of Gaza by force,<sup>7</sup> leaving a separate Fatah administration in control of the West Bank.<sup>8</sup>

## 4 Fatah-Hamas reconciliation

On 23 April 2014 it was announced that Fatah and Hamas had signed a reconciliation agreement.<sup>9</sup> On 29 May 2014 Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, asked Rami Hamdallah to form an interim unity government with jurisdiction over both the

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, *About the occupied Palestinian territory* (accessed on 30 June 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Knesset (Parliament of Israel), *Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements*, 13 September 1993; *Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip*, 28 September 1995

<sup>3</sup> "Israel suspends peace talks with Palestinians after Fatah-Hamas deal", *The Guardian*, 24 April 2014

<sup>4</sup> International Development Committee, The UK's Development Work in the Middle East, [evidence submitted by DFID](#)

<sup>5</sup> "Hamas celebrates election victory", *The Guardian*, 26 January 2006

<sup>6</sup> "Israel snubs Palestinian coalition", *The Guardian*, 18 March 2007

<sup>7</sup> "Hamas takes control of Gaza", *The Guardian*, 15 June 2007

<sup>8</sup> International Development Committee, The UK's Development Work in the Middle East, [evidence submitted by DFID](#)

<sup>9</sup> "Fatah and the Hamas agree unity government", *The Telegraph*, 23 April 2014

West Bank and Gaza.<sup>10</sup> Disputes promptly arose between Fatah and Hamas as to (i) who should be appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs; and (ii) whether there should be a Minister of Prisoners' Affairs: President Abbas had wanted to abolish the latter position, but this was opposed by Hamas. Ultimately it was agreed that the role would be merged into Rami Hamdallah's portfolio, and Hamdallah announced the makeup of his new Cabinet within days.

Whilst the Cabinet has the support of both Fatah and Hamas, its makeup is primarily technocratic. There are no Hamas ministers, and only one Fatah minister (Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah); all the other Ministers are unaffiliated.<sup>11</sup> The full Cabinet is as follows:

- Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior: Rami Hamdallah
- Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Culture: Ziad Abu Amr
- Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of National Economy: Muhammad Mustafa
- Minister of Finance, Minister of Planning: Shuki Bishara
- Minister of Foreign Affairs: Riyad al-Maliki
- Minister of Justice: Salim al-Saqqa
- Minister for Jerusalem Affairs: Adnan al-Husayni
- Minister of Tourism & Antiquities: Rula Maaya
- Minister of Health: Jawad Qutaish
- Minister of Education & Higher Education: Khawla al-Shaksheer
- Minister of Information, Minister of Transportation: Allam Said Musa
- Minister of Public Works & Housing: Muhammad Salim al-Hasania
- Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Social Affairs: Shawki Aleessa
- Minister of Women's Affairs: Haifa Fahmi Hafez Aga
- Minister of Labour: Maumoon Abdul Hadi Hassan Abu Shahla
- Minister of Local Government: Nayef Abu Khalaf
- Minister of Waqf & Religious Affairs: Yusuf Ismail al-Sheikh
- Secretary-General of the Cabinet: Ali Mahmoud Abdullah Abu Diak<sup>12</sup>

Despite Hamas' continuing refusal to recognise the state of Israel, President Abbas has announced that the new Government will abide by the so-called "Quartet principles": recognition of Israel, rejection of violence, and respect for existing agreements. The mandate of the interim administration is expected to end with new elections in 2015.<sup>13</sup>

## 5 Reaction by Israel

Following the announcement of the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation on 23 April, Israel announced that its US-brokered talks with the Palestinians would be placed on hold indefinitely.<sup>14</sup> Gaza-based members of the new administration required Israeli permission to travel to the West Bank for the swearing-in ceremony: three were refused such permission.<sup>15</sup> (Travel between Gaza and the West Bank involves passing through Israel: Israel maintains strict controls on who is allowed to enter the country from Gaza.<sup>16</sup>)

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<sup>10</sup> "Abbas asks PM Rami Hamdallah to head Fatah-Hamas unity cabinet", *BBC News*, 29 May 2014

<sup>11</sup> "Palestinian unity government of Fatah and Hamas sworn in", *The Guardian*, 2 June 2014

<sup>12</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, *Palestinian Authority: Unity Cabinet* (accessed 30 June 2014)

<sup>13</sup> "Palestinian unity government of Fatah and Hamas sworn in", *The Guardian*, 2 June 2014

<sup>14</sup> "Israel halts peace talks as Hamas and Fatah strike unity deal", *The Telegraph*, 24 April 2014

<sup>15</sup> "Fatah-Hamas unity government will strengthen terror, says Netanyahu", *The Guardian*, 1 June 2014

<sup>16</sup> "Tales from Gaza: What is life really like in 'the world's largest outdoor prison'?", *The Independent*, 13 April 2013

Following the swearing-in ceremony, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said:

Today, Abu Mazen said yes to terrorism and no to peace. This is the direct continuation of Abu Mazen's policy of refusing peace. While Israel has carried out courageous and painful steps on behalf of the diplomatic process and continues to be committed to peace, Abu Mazen has refused to extend the negotiations, has rejected the American framework document, continues to incite against Israel, has unilaterally acceded to UN treaties and has now forged a pact with the Hamas terrorist organization.

Abu Mazen has forged a pact with the Hamas organization, which is responsible for the murder of over 1,000 innocent Israelis and the firing of thousands of missiles at Israeli cities.

Abu Mazen has forged a pact with Hamas, an organization which has been declared a terrorist organization in the US, Europe, Egypt and throughout the world, and which completely rejects the international community's conditions. The international community needs to treat it accordingly.

In recent days, the leaders of the Hamas terrorist organization have reiterated their commitment to the path of terrorism and to the elimination of the State of Israel.

The agreement with Hamas makes Abu Mazen directly responsible for the terrorism emanating from Gaza.

The State of Israel will not conduct diplomatic negotiations with a Palestinian government with backing from Hamas, a terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel.<sup>17</sup>

President Abbas claimed that Israel was set to withhold tax revenues from the PA.<sup>18</sup> (In accordance with the Oslo Accords, the Israeli authorities collect certain taxes on behalf of the Palestinian authority.)

## **6 Reaction by international community**

Following the swearing-in of the new administration Jen Psaki, spokesperson for the US State Department, said:

At this point, it appears that President Abbas has formed an interim technocratic government that does not include ministers affiliated with Hamas. With what we know now, we will work with this government.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu declared himself “deeply troubled” by the US statement, whilst his Communications Minister Gilad Erdan said:

Unfortunately, American naivety has broken all records. Any collaboration with Hamas – which kills women and children – is unacceptable [...] This American capitulation can only damage chances of resuming [peace] negotiations.

An EU statement said:

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<sup>17</sup> ["Security Cabinet on the Hamas-PA government"](#), *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2 June 2014

<sup>18</sup> ["Fatah-Hamas unity government will strengthen terror, says Netanyahu"](#), *The Guardian*, 1 June 2014

We welcome [...] the declaration by President Abbas that this new government is committed to the principle of the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, to the recognition of Israel's legitimate right to exist. The EU's engagement with the new Palestinian government will be based on its adherence to these policies and commitments.

China, Turkey and India have also indicated their support for the new administration.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> ["Israel condemns US for backing Palestinian unity government"](#), *The Guardian*, 3 June 2014