



Canadians for Justice and Peace  
in the Middle East



# Module 3: The Palestinian Unity Government

CJPME Policy Leadership  
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# Agenda for this Module

- The Unity Government
  - Dynamics of its formation
  - Details of the Government's platform
  - Makeup of government
- Reactions to new Government
  - Does new platform satisfy demands of Israel and its supporters?
  - International & Israeli
  - Implications of new government
  - Implications of US arms shipments to Palestine



In Baqa'a, Jordan's largest camp for Palestinian refugees, children pose in the doorway of their UNRWA-constructed household. These children represent the fourth or even fifth generation of refugees to live in Baqa'a camp.



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# The Palestinian Unity Government

# Brief History since January 2006

- Jan, 2006: Hamas elected to power
- Mar, 2006: Hamas forms cabinet
- Mar/Apr, 2006: Canada, US others refuse to engage with new PA govt
- May, 2006: First US shipment of arms to Fatah
- Jun, 2006: Prisoners document
- Aug/Sep, 2006: Discussions between Abbas and Haniyeh
- Jan, 2007: Abbas and Haniyeh meet in Mecca with Saudis as mediators
- Feb, 2007: Agreement reached in Mecca
- Feb, 2007: US says sanctions will continue
- Mar, 2007: New cabinet chosen – Unity govt officially formed



*A Palestinian boy passes by a building covered with electoral posters of different electoral lists running for the Palestinian Legislative Elections in the West bank city of Nablus January 22, 2006.*

# Dynamics of the Mecca Negotiations

- Negotiations conducted in a context of serious armed conflict between Hamas and Fatah
- Abbas' gains:
  - Hope to alleviate siege on Palestinian people
  - Regains semblance of authority for Fatah
- Abbas' approach to negotiations:
  - Get Hamas to separate its ideology from its government platform
  - Get Hamas to agree to vote for the Saudi Peace Plan
- Definition of Unity
  - Abbas: Transformation of both the character and composition of government
  - Haniyeh:
    - Incorporate Fatah into government as a minority partner in order to get Hamas prisoners released from Israeli jails
    - Get better Hamas representation in Fatah-dominated PLO



# What is the Platform of the Unity Govt - 1

- First: Political Positions
  - 1. End the occupation; work with Arab League; establish a Palestinian state along 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as capital
  - 2. Respect agreements signed by the PLO
  - 4. Rejects the “so called state with temporary borders”
  - 5. Affirms rights of Palestinian refugees under resolution 194
  - 6. Will confront the occupation on the ground
  - 7. Will work with regional and international leaders
- Second: Jerusalem – Track Israeli policies in Jerusalem
- Third: Confronting the Occupation
  - 1. Resistance is a legitimate right of the Palestinians; Palestinians have the right to defend themselves against Israeli aggression
  - 2. Consolidate calm, and expand it to become a comprehensive reciprocal truce, as Israel relaxes its military occupation
  - 3. PLO will negotiate for Palestinians: any agreement must be ratified by the Palestinian National Council, or via a referendum

# What is the Platform of the Unity Govt - 2

- Fourth: Security
  - 1. Create a higher national security council which manages all security organizations
  - 2. Restructure security forces apart from political alliances
  - 4. Create a plan to prevent sectarian infighting among forces
- Fifth: Legal – Judicial and constitutional commitments
- Sixth: Economic
  - 1. Stop siege on Palestinians, and create new regionally-based funding mechanisms
  - 2. Reconsider the Paris Agreement (which allows Israel to collect customs duties on behalf of the PA)
  - 3. Develop stronger trade with regional Arab and Islamic partners
- Seventh: Reform – Financial reform and anti-corruption measures
- Eighth: Values – Reduce political tensions; promote justice, freedom, human rights, democracy, political pluralism
- Ninth: International Relations – Strengthen, esp with EU, China, Russia, Japan, Africa and Asia, i.e. loosen dependency with West

# What is the Platform of the Unity Govt - 3

- What wasn't resolved through the Unity Government Agreement
  - Failed to agree on forming a supreme national security council, the Executive Force that Hamas formed
  - Failed to agree on the division of budgets,
  - Failed to agree on how to reshape the Palestine Liberation Organization
  - Failed to agree on how to give Hamas a share of diplomatic postings abroad.



# What is the power-sharing arrangement?

- Ismail Haniyeh is again the prime minister
- Mahmoud Abbas is still the president
- Unity government functions via the sharing of seats in cabinet, 25 seats in total
  - Hamas controls the appointment of a majority of the seats; Fatah controls the appointment of a minority of seats
  - Several cabinet positions assigned to independents
  - Several cabinet posts require joint approval
- Abbas recognized as the sole legal negotiator for the Palestinians



*Azzam al-Ahmad, left, a Fatah appointee is be deputy PM to Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, who continues as PM of the Palestinian Authority.*

# Interesting Appointments



## Dr Mustafa Barghouti - minister of information

- Chief mediator between the rival Palestinian groups during the recent crisis.
- Born Jerusalem and is the founder and head of the influential medical relief committees and an advocate of non-violent resistance.
- Internationally known politician and commentator and speaks Russian, English and Arabic. Secular and a democracy activist who contested the presidential election in 2005, finishing a distant second to Mahmoud Abbas.



## Salam Fayad - finance minister (Third Way Party)

- PhD in economics from the University of Texas;
- He worked as a university economist before moving to work at the World Bank HQ in Washington from 1987-95;
- He served as finance minister under the Fatah controlled government from 2002-05 and initiated major reforms of the financial system that won international praise and worked hard to curb official corruption



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# Reactions to the Unity Government

# Does the Unity Govt Platform satisfy the demands of Israel and its supporters?

- Demands imposed:
  1. Acceptance of previously negotiated accords
  2. Recognition of Israel;
  3. Renunciation of violent resistance;
- Unity Government Platform:
  1. New government pledges to “achieve national objectives through the resolutions of [Palestinian bodies...] and the resolutions of the Arab Summits, and shall respect the international resolutions and agreements signed by the PLO [i.e. Palestine Liberation Organization.]”
  2. By citing its support for the Arab League Peace Plan (a.k.a. Saudi Peace Plan) which includes recognition of Israel and its borders (and Oslo), the new government implicitly states its recognition of Israel.
  3. While the new government reserves the right of Palestinians to defend themselves against the Israeli military occupation, it nevertheless commits to “consolidating calm and expanding it to a comprehensive reciprocal truce [with Israel.]”



# Other key points of Unity Platform

- NCCAR summarized several of the other key points of the platform as follows:
  - Respects international law and all existing agreements signed by the PLO;
  - Accepts Abbas' Negotiating role: Acknowledges that negotiations are the mandate of the PLO; entrusts President Abbas, as the legitimate Palestinian negotiator, to conduct negotiations to end the conflict;
  - Supports two-state solution: Has defined as its goal a solution based on two states through the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders and the consolidation of a strong foundation for peace, security and prosperity for present and future generations in the entire region;
  - Will work with Int'l Community for Peace: Has reaffirmed that, as the international community has acknowledged, ending the occupation is an essential requirement for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. It has expressed its commitment to work with the international community to achieve these objectives;
  - Cessation of violence, and release of Israeli Prisoner. Has also made a firm commitment to a comprehensive reciprocal ceasefire, and indicated that it will work with all concerned partners for the release of Gilad Shalit on the basis of an exchange of prisoners.

# Israel's Rejection of the Unity Gov't

## Israeli Leaders Words

- Shimon Peres, March 17<sup>th</sup>: "If this is a government that does not renounce terror, if this is a government that does not want to conduct peace talks, why should it be helped?"
- Ehud Olmert, March 18<sup>th</sup>: "We think that the new government as it was founded with this platform, limits our ability to hold a dialogue with the chairman of the Palestinian Authority and limits the scope of the subjects on which we could hold discussions in the coming future,"



## Palestinian Leaders Words

- Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, March 18<sup>th</sup>: Says his government "affirms that resistance in all its means, including the popular resistance against occupation" is a Palestinian right. (Popular resistance is jargon for demonstrations and other non-violent protests against Israel.)
- President Mahmoud Abbas, March 18<sup>th</sup>: I extend my "hand again for peace and equality" in a speech preceding the parliament's vote on the unity government. He said he rejects "all sorts of violence and we look for an agreement, a solution that is based on negotiations."



# Other Reactions

## United States

- US refuses to acknowledge the Unity government because it “will not explicitly recognize the State of Israel.”

## European Union

- March: Initially open to dialog – “wait and see” attitude. Wanted to meet with ministers of the Unity Government
- April: Met with new Finance Minister, decided against reinstating direct aid to the Palestinian Authority
- April: Reconfirmed its continued use of the “TIM” (Temporary International Mechanism) to channel aid to the Palestinian people
- April: Decides to maintain ties with non-Hamas ministers in the Unity Government

## Russian Federation

- Calls on international community to back the new Unity Government



The EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, said: “The current situation is very critical, but we are determined to bring relief to the Palestinian people. This first action through the Temporary International Mechanism, will make a tangible contribution to the continued provision of essential health services.”

# Norwegian Support for the Unity Govt

## Norway

- Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, March 17<sup>th</sup>: “In its programme, the Unity Government is taking important steps towards complying with the international community’s demands. Norway will thus on this basis re-establish political and economic relations with the Palestinian Government.”
- “The alternative to this government would be continued violence and unrest in the Palestinian territory.”
- “Norway will deal with members of the new Palestinian Government as representatives of a broad and representative Unity Government. Norway upholds its demands on Hamas as an organisation.”
- “We particularly call on Israel to take a constructive approach to the Unity Government, for example by releasing withheld Palestinian revenues from taxes and fees and by increasing the freedom of movement for the Palestinian population.”



*Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Støre*

# Implications of having a Unity Government

- The best hope of quelling sectarian violence in Palestine
- Provides international and regional players a single, unified entity to deal with
- Provides a single player which can truly represent the majority of Palestinian polity
  - Any agreement that might be signed in the future would have the buy-in of a broad constituency
  - It would not make sense for Israel (or others) to deal with a negotiator which has very limited credibility in Palestine
- International players should engage with the Unity Government soon – there is no luxury to assume the Unity Government will endure for a long time without any real movement

# Implications of US Military Support for Hamas

- The US is known to have made several shipments of arms (with Israeli approval) to Abbas' Fatah militants
  - First shipment was in June
  - Confirmed budget of \$26M USD in 2006, and \$84.6M USD in early 2007, for assault rifles, ammunition, training camps, training and expanded hiring
  - Note that Hamas intercepted four truckloads of supplies on Feb. 2
- Implications of this behaviour on part of US
  - More arms in Palestine – greater susceptibility to violence
  - Arms race between Hamas and Fatah
  - Historically, such arms have ultimately been turned against Israel (e.g. Second Intifada)
  - Perception that Abbas is a pawn of the West



*With US funding, Abbas' Presidential Guard has increased to 1,000, up from about 90 officers under Yasser Arafat.*

# Concluding Thoughts – Rami Khouri, Daily Star, Beirut

- Demands by Israel and its Western supporters may be reasonable, “but they are made unreasonable and illogical by being unilaterally imposed on the Palestinians in a context of siege and starvation warfare.”
- Power imbalance makes “reasonable demands” unpalatable. Israel, the occupier, imposes conditions on the Palestinians with the support of the US and much of the West. Under these conditions, reasonable demands become divisive dictates.
- What are the West’s promises to the Unity Govt: The Unity Government needs guarantees on what it would get by explicitly giving in to Israeli demands, “such as parallel Israeli compliance with international norms of reasonable conduct. This [would include] Israel's uprooting rogue colonies..., stopping land expropriations, releasing jailed officials, and ending assassinations of Palestinian militants and civilians.”
- Equal Expectations. Diplomacy which does not impose equal expectations on all parties is a useless and tired exercise: “The only diplomatic process that will succeed has never been seriously attempted: a demand for equal and simultaneous concessions from Israelis and Palestinians on key issues of statehood, recognition, coexistence, and renunciation of violence.”



# Concluding Thoughts – Marwa Awad, CJPME Ottawa

- Why is all discussion framed around Israel's concerns? “The best thing for everyone is to quit placing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the hegemonic framework of the Jewish State's security issues, fears etc and the US's future plans of ransacking the region of the middle east.”
- The Occupation is the real debate. “What this is about is the unlawful occupation of a people's lands and those people's right to resist.”
- Why does Israel's narrative dominate public debate? “Westerners accept the outdated narrative of the Jewish nationhood and sovereignty which dates 2000 years back. The Palestinian narrative of sovereignty and nationhood extends only sixty years back.”



*A copy of a training manual distributed by US military trainers to officers of the Palestinian Presidential Guard during a two-week course held in Jericho earlier this year.*



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**Thank You!**