

# How Hamas Is Trying to Shape the “Day After” in Gaza

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Brief Analysis

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**A detailed look at what the group has been telling other Palestinians as it maneuvers to retake a role in the wider national movement and rebuild its forces.**

Over the past few weeks, Hamas leaders have been engaged in talks with other Palestinian factions and select Arab states to find a formula for postwar governance in the Gaza Strip. Held mainly in Qatar and Egypt, the negotiations have not matured into a clear plan so far, but some forms of cooperation are emerging on the ground in parts of the embattled enclave.

Both the Hamas Executive Committee (based in Doha) and Yahya al-Sinwar’s circle of military leaders (currently hiding in Gaza tunnels) have apparently come to realize that the group cannot continue ruling Gaza on its own and must therefore **[look for partners \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/growing-internal-tensions-between-hamas-leaders\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/growing-internal-tensions-between-hamas-leaders)**. In particular, they fear that no foreign reconstruction funding will be forthcoming unless they help install a different type of administration nominally led by other Palestinian players. Yet they are also confident that they can deter Arab states and other foreign powers from sending forces to Gaza even if they are compelled to go underground indefinitely. In fact, senior Hamas officials such as Osama Hamdan are on record threatening to fight any non-Palestinian presence deployed to police or manage the Strip.

To balance these potentially conflicting objectives, Hamas officials have informed their interlocutors that they are willing to support the formation of either a “technocratic government” or one composed of factions that agree to Palestinian “reconciliation.” They have also insisted that security issues not be part of this government’s authority. In other words, Hamas is happy to let others **[shoulder civil responsibilities \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/what-hamas-wants-postwar-gaza-power-fight-without-burden-governing\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/what-hamas-wants-postwar-gaza-power-fight-without-burden-governing)** while it focuses on rebuilding its armed networks **[behind the scenes \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/can-hamas-be-defeated\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/can-hamas-be-defeated)**.

# Intra-Palestinian Maneuvers

**H**amas has held countless rounds of discussions with delegates from the rival Fatah movement over the past decade and a half, and none of them produced a viable compromise. The same is true for talks held during the current war by such disparate hosts as Algeria, [China \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/tracking-chinese-statements-hamas-israel-conflict\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/tracking-chinese-statements-hamas-israel-conflict), Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, and Russia. The conditions that Hamas has laid out for “national reconciliation” are clearly aimed at removing Fatah’s grip over the Palestinian Authority and Palestine Liberation Organization—namely, by establishing “unified leadership” over the PLO, forming a “consensus government” in the PA, and holding new presidential and general elections.

PA president Mahmoud Abbas has rejected these demands so long as Hamas refuses to abide by the PLO’s commitment to the Oslo Accords with Israel. (Hamas’s charter does not recognize Israel and has explicitly called for its destruction.) Yet Jibril Rajoub and certain other influential members of the Fatah Central Committee have advocated for cooperating with Hamas on some issues while deferring controversial matters to a later phase. In turn, Hamas is trying to widen the fissures within Fatah and find more officials who may be willing to go along with its vision for postwar Gaza.

On June 12, several ex-PLO and PA officials held an unprecedented meeting in Ramallah and signed an initiative calling for the inclusion of additional factions, meaning Hamas. The PA security services had blocked previous attempts to arrange such meetings in the West Bank. This time, Ahmed Ghneim and other veteran Fatah figures joined the challenge to President Abbas and were “encouraged” to retract their endorsement once their participation became known. Hamas also believes that many Fatah loyalists in Gaza—including thousands of former employees who still receive (reduced) salaries from the PA—may be willing to participate in a new system of governance there.

Toward that end, top Hamas figures have held intensive deliberations with senior Fatah official Mohammad Dahlan’s “Reformist Democratic Current” since the war began, initially focusing on the coordination and distribution of aid in Gaza with financing from the United Arab Emirates. They have also established “Emergency Committees” in various parts of the Strip.

A former security chief in Gaza until 2007 and a long-reputed foe of Hamas, Dahlan was expelled from Fatah in 2011 and charged with playing a role in the claimed “assassination” of PLO chairman Yasser Arafat. He now resides in Abu Dhabi and enjoys support from the Emirati ruling family. Although he has often declared that Gaza’s future should be “No Abbas, No Hamas,” the current war has seen him deploy trusted assistants (e.g., Samir Masharawi and Majed Abu Shamaleh) to Egypt to orchestrate aid deliveries while empowering his top confidant in Gaza, Osama al-Fara, to keep in close touch with local Hamas commanders. Meanwhile, his ally Nasser al-Qudwa—a former PA foreign minister—maintains close contacts with Hamas in Qatar. Both Dahlan and Qudwa are now publicly arguing that the Gaza crisis cannot be solved without Hamas’s participation or, at least, consent. A similar stance has been attributed to Marwan Barghouti, the popular Fatah leader who is serving a life sentence in an Israeli jail and is a potential candidate for release if the parties reach a deal for swapping hostages and prisoners.

Nevertheless, Dahlan has remained evasive about openly partnering with Hamas once hostilities subside. He apparently believes it is still too early to commit himself despite pursuing limited humanitarian and civil cooperation with the group on the ground. For Hamas, a deal with Dahlan would carry the promise of major Emirati reconstruction funding given his ties with Abu Dhabi.

In the meantime, Hamas has already convinced certain smaller PLO factions to get on board with its postwar model. Under the Damascus-based Jamil Mazhar, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine has turned into a de facto junior partner of Hamas in recent years despite its secular left-wing doctrines. Other minor factions—such as the communist Palestinian People’s Party, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and al-Saeqah—have

expressed support for a broad Gaza government with Hamas as its primary backer. Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other armed groups that fight alongside Hamas have accepted this objective as well.

With generous help from Qatar, Hamas also started a campaign in March asking unaffiliated Palestinian activists from Arab countries and the diaspora to press for a collaborative Hamas role in postwar Gaza. Their main idea for promoting this plan is to convene a “Palestinian National Congress” with hundreds of delegates. Preparatory meetings have already been held in Britain, Lebanon, Kuwait, and Qatar, and more are planned for the United States, Spain, Belgium, Australia, and France. This month’s meeting in Doha was chaired by Azmi Bishara, a former Israeli parliamentarian who fled the country in 2007 due to fears that he would be prosecuted for providing information to Hezbollah during the 2006 Lebanon war. Now employed by a Qatari government research center, he oversaw the meeting’s adoption of resolutions that called for replacing the current PLO leadership with a new unified command—or creating a separate rival body to undermine the Fatah-dominated PLO.

Naturally, the PLO has condemned these calls and accused Bishara and his colleagues of being “supported and funded by regional circles.” Yet no other faction echoed this condemnation aside from the tiny “Popular Struggle Front,” demonstrating Abbas’s isolation and the growing appeal of Hamas’s proposals.

## Conclusion

**W**ith thousands of its fighters still alive, Hamas is feverishly searching for new ways to stay in charge once a [ceasefire is in place \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/improving-overlooked-aspect-gaza-ceasefire-proposal\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/improving-overlooked-aspect-gaza-ceasefire-proposal). Behind the facade of a Palestinian alliance, it has offered to relinquish civilian control—but only for the sake of refreshing its military arsenal, rebuilding its tunnel networks, and recruiting fresh manpower.

If Palestinian factions not directly involved in the war agree to provide such cover by forming a new Hamas-backed administration, it would make Israel’s continued task of pursuing the group’s fighters much more complicated. Even if Hamas was not formally part of said government, the flow of international aid to such a body would still benefit Hamas’s armed “wing,” which has [invented many methods \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/moderate-hamas-statements-are-old-ploy\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/moderate-hamas-statements-are-old-ploy) to cut profits from the local economy over the years. For example, according to estimates by the author and other researchers, the group has already gleaned around \$120-200 million from taxing humanitarian convoys during the current war.

To prevent the implementation of this Hamas plan for the “day after,” the United States and other Western nations could advise Arab states, the PA, and other Palestinian actors not to lend a hand to the group’s political resurrection. The following measures may be particularly effective:

- Donor states could warn any Fatah members who contemplate an arrangement with Hamas that cooperating with a designated terrorist organization has consequences. The UAE is currently the largest Arab provider of aid to Gaza and has a long tradition of combating the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas’s ideological parent group. As such, it may be willing to pump the brakes on any deal between Dahlan and Hamas.
- Egyptian president Abdul Fattah al-Sisi should be put on notice that there will be a price to pay (e.g., regarding congressional oversight of annual U.S. military assistance) if his intelligence services and army personnel keep facilitating weapons smuggling to Hamas through Rafah’s cross-border tunnels.
- Qatar should be asked to condition its aid to Gaza on barring Hamas from any role in the territory’s postwar administration.
- Israel should change its declared policy and accept that a “revitalized” PA, [once ready \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/west-bank-economics-are-key-stabilizing-palestinian-authority-or-forcing-its\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/west-bank-economics-are-key-stabilizing-palestinian-authority-or-forcing-its), will necessarily be invited to take over Gaza. Jerusalem should also commit to help with the

territory's reconstruction. This includes revisiting its objection to **building a port** (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/unlike-airdrops-maritime-aid-corridors-can-actually-help-gaza>) in the Strip—a project that has attracted interest from Saudi Arabia.

In the wake of the October 7 massacre, the idea of Hamas playing a role in Gaza's governance is intolerable. A firm Western statement to this effect—perhaps in a forum like this week's G7 summit—would go a long way toward pouring cold water on the terrorist group's aspirations to dominate the “day after.”

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