

A Paralyzing Rivalry

by [Ghaith al-Omari \(/experts/ghaith-al-omari\)](/experts/ghaith-al-omari)

Oct 27, 2016

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Ghaith al-Omari \(/experts/ghaith-al-omari\)](/experts/ghaith-al-omari)

Ghaith al-Omari is a senior fellow in The Washington Institute's Irwin Levy Family Program on the U.S.-Israel Strategic Relationship.



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As Hamas prepares to elect a new leadership, its outward show of unity masks deep internal divisions that will likely perpetuate its regional isolation.

The upcoming internal Hamas elections, which will be conducted over a number of months in a secretive, phased process, will take place in a radically altered regional landscape. In 2013, when Hamas -- the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood -- conducted its last elections, it seemed to be on the winning side of regional dynamics. Egypt was ruled by a Muslim Brotherhood president (Mohamed Morsi), its patrons in Qatar and Turkey were at the center of regional politics, and the tensions between Iran -- Hamas' military backer -- and Arab Gulf states were far from their current level of intensity.

But what seemed like a winning trajectory in 2013 has turned into a political dead end. The leaders of Egypt who replaced the Muslim Brotherhood, including President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, are deeply antagonistic towards Hamas. The regional influence of Qatar and Turkey has been drastically reduced, and the rise of political Islam has been replaced by the growing tensions between Iran and the so-called Arab Sunni camp led by Saudi Arabia.

The election of new Hamas leadership could theoretically provide the movement with an opportunity to reset its regional alliances. Yet the rivalries and competing interests between Hamas' various components create a dynamic that makes such realignment unlikely...

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