

Six Takes on the Palestinian Unity Deal

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Although the deal indicates that Abbas's primary concern is managing relations with his hardline rivals, Washington should still continue its efforts to revive the peace talks.

P*BS reporter Larisa Epatko asked six Middle East analysts for their take on the latest Hamas-Fatah deal. The following is Dr. Pollock's response; [read other responses on the PBS website \(http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/will-palestinian-unity-deal-work\)](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/will-palestinian-unity-deal-work).*

For Abbas, this is a clear sign he sees the current peace talks going nowhere. And, unfortunately, that he cares less about relations with the U.S. or Israel than about his hardline rivals.

We've seen very similar Palestinian unity deals before, only to watch them crash ever since Hamas won the 2006 election. The terms now are much like the previous, Qatari-sponsored attempt -- which ran aground when they couldn't even agree on a short-term "unity government." But this one has a better chance of getting started, because Hamas is much weaker now due to shifts in Egypt, Syria, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and its own lower appeal in Gaza. It is also a bit easier now because Hamas bete noire Salam Fayyad has already been replaced as Palestinian Authority prime minister.

Even if they do implement the first steps, the next step -- an election in six months -- will be very hard. That's an eternity in the region, and Hamas knows it will almost surely lose big, according to all the polls, so it may well raise obstacles.

For Israel, this is a good rationale for avoiding any new peace steps. Netanyahu has already said "Abbas can have either peace with Hamas, or peace with Israel." And Israel just canceled the next scheduled meeting with the Palestinian Authority and U.S. envoy Martin Indyk.

So, for U.S. negotiators, this is one more big uncertainty and complication.

Still, Hamas is now on record (again) as accepting Palestinian Authority-Israel talks (though not peace with Israel). This time, the deal says the talks can continue "under clear conditions" -- presumably a settlement freeze, prisoner release, and early discussion of borders. These are too much, but there may be some room for maneuver.

Therefore, the U.S. could and should keep trying to revive the peace talks. It will be harder than ever, but probably even worse to stop trying. True, there is now a clearer U.S. option to walk away by saying "well, the Palestinians chose unity over peace" -- and to hope the unity deal quickly falls apart. But I think that's a riskier option, because it could invite unilateral provocations by either side as well as further criticism from our remaining Arab friends.

David Pollock is the Kaufman Fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

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