

Chances for implementing the Doha Agreement

Attendance (without distinction): Nabil Kassis, Abdel Qader Hussein, Zahi Khoury, Hisham Kuhail, Rami Mehdawi, Mazen Ghneim, Daoud Talhami, Walid Ahmad, Munib Al Masri, Saleh Ra'fat, Qays Abdel Karim, Mohammed Shtayeh, Zahira Kamal, Fajr Harb, Azmi Shuabi, Hanan Ashrawi, Lily Feidy

MIFTAH Team: Rula Muzaffar, Bisan Abu Ruqti, Ala' Karajeh, Joharah Baker

Introduction:

The reconciliation agreement, known as the Doha Declaration, was signed in the Qatari capital, Doha on February 6. This was followed by a long impasse, which has yet to end. This was due to the discrepancies in the positions of Hamas leaders inside and abroad and given the conditions and changes taking place in the region. This resulted in the failure to address the mechanisms for ending the split such as taking steps to carry out elections and form a government of nonpolitical technocrats headed by President Mahmoud Abbas. Ultimately, reconciliation was never achieved because factional interests superseded national interests and thus more time was lost. Israel took this opportunity to impose its control over all of the West Bank and continue its oppressive measures against the Palestinian people.

Until this date, the necessary steps for holding elections and reforming the PLO have been yet to be taken. Neither have the reconciliation committees been able to begin their work. Hence, it was necessary to discuss the dimensions of this declaration, its obligations and the chances of its implementation in addition to discussing the ramifications of this lack of reconciliation on the Palestinian political condition. Finally, future scenarios, viewpoints and general policy guidelines were discussed in light of the current political and economic challenges at the Palestinian, regional and international levels.

Discussion:

Elections:

The Doha Declaration brought with it a cautious optimism; this is because there are practical indicators that point to a real commitment to achieve reconciliation, which must be implemented. For one, for this reconciliation to have any legitimacy and credibility, elections must be held and all steps necessary for this to happen must take place. Furthermore, there must be a commitment to the requirements for forming an independent government of technocrats that would be internationally acceptable, with specific and clear goals: these goals are to hold

elections and oversee the reconstruction of Gaza. Some predictions were that no reconciliation could happen before the Shura Council elections took place inside Hamas in addition to the elections for the movement's politburo, which will not be for weeks.

Discrepancies in Hamas' positions

Some participants doubted the extent to which Hamas was willing to abide by the reconciliation agreement as a result of the differences in the opinions of its leaders' inside Palestine and abroad. Furthermore there was the emergence of a more hard line strain of Hamas represented in the positions of Mahmoud Zahhar and Ismail Haniyeh. This group viewed Khaled Meshaal's agreement to allow President Abbas the prime ministry without giving the movement any guarantees on other issues (such as reformation of the PLO and the revival of the PLC) as a rejected concession. Thus, Hamas obstructed the work of the elections committee in Gaza and showed no indication that they would allow them to conduct voter registry, which has not been conducted for years in the Strip. It used political excuses as a way of stalling and took advantage of the elections committee dispute to further obstruct and hinder progress, claiming that Fatah wanted to get rid of the movement through the ballot box. Hence, it continued to stall on the elections committee to buy more time and to rearrange its own internal situation including predictions over the future of the movement in Syria after the leadership moved its offices out of Damascus. This was in addition to other regional changes, which the movement was addressing, especially in Egypt.

Over time, a "force to be reckoned with" had developed in the Gaza Strip which was benefiting from the split due to interests and privileges, which it did not want to relinquish. This group would reap no benefits from solving the crisis because it has built its interests on the status quo. Over and above is the complicated situation within Hamas – the differences in interests and competitive nature between its leaders. This is even true inside its military wing, whose approach has been affected by the changes in the area in addition to the direct Iranian support some Hamas leaders receive.

Popular action

The current situation calls for popular pressure to achieve unity for the Palestinians, especially in Gaza, and to force Hamas to accept the steps for implementing the Declaration. Furthermore, factions must also put the responsibility where it belongs, which is on the party impeding the reconciliation because there is no way to end the split except by referring back to the people through the ballot boxes.

All Palestinian factions are in a state of perplexity and crisis at the moment; Hamas is no longer a faction that exercises resistance while at the same time it does not want to participate in elections. Meanwhile, Fatah forfeited armed resistance but failed at its policy of negotiations. Furthermore, at the popular level, it has been very difficult to invoke a widespread and

comprehensive popular resistance movement with the lack of a national consensus over a clear political message.

Reforming the PLO

While the dispute continues between Hamas and Fatah over the PLO, Hamas wants PLC elections in tandem with the formation of the government. There is also a dispute over the size of representation within the PLO, and the new relationship this would create between the caretaker government in Ramallah and the deposed government in Gaza based on a confederation. That is, two executive authorities with one government.

Hence, it can be concluded that secondary issues cannot be addressed until the basic issue is solved, with is the matter of the government and elections.

Recommendations:

- There must be a real agreement between the two sides before going to elections or else the split will only be further entrenched; the agreement would be “cosmetic” while performance on the ground would reflect the deepening rift.
- Stances must be taken against all those who obstruct reaching reconciliation, especially those who are benefiting from its absence; personal and factional interests should not be allowed to stand in the way of implementing the reconciliation deal.
- There must be an insistence on reaching reconciliation; youth and popular movements should take to the streets in the various districts demanding that it be implemented now.
- Efforts towards the professional and practical dimensions of the reconciliation should be made by experts and professionals because political action is insufficient on its own.
- The need for a new vision for reestablishing the Palestinian national movement and not just an improvement of relationships between the current parties. Hence, there must be a reuniting of the people and not just these two major movements.
- The Palestinian people are in real crisis and are facing international marginalization. They are no longer a priority on international agendas after the regional changes that have taken place. Furthermore, we should not depend on any American or Israeli positions. What we need is political will and responsible political stances to confront the deadlocked political avenues and Israeli escalations at all levels.

Note: Representative from Hamas were invited to the session but declined.