

The Israeli-Palestinian Arena: Straddling Escalation and Calm

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On February 8, 2007, Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled Mashal, head of the Hamas political bureau, signed an agreement in Mecca on the principles for a unity government; the new government was approved by the Palestinian parliament and sworn in by President Abbas on March 17. Even before formulating the joint coalition manifesto, however, the sides had agreed to stop firing at Israel in order to alleviate Israeli pressure on the Gaza Strip. This decision, which was announced in November and was met with a cessation of IDF activity in the Gaza Strip, changed the Israeli-Palestinian dynamic after months of confrontation. At the same time, the challenge facing the government of Israel faced remained, since Israel agreed on the ceasefire with President Abbas only. However, in view of the balance of power in the Palestinian arena that has emerged in recent years, it seems unlikely that the ceasefire will endure without coordination between Israel and Palestinian Authority representation, among them members of Hamas. Agreement on the creation of a unity government may help to expand the dialogue framework and to promote understandings between Israel and a joint, representative Palestinian team that will bear overall security responsibility.

And Now: A Unity Government

The unity government, announced on March 15 and ratified by the Palestinian Legislative Council two days later, was the product of arduous negotiations between Fatah and Hamas. Indeed, the talks between the Fatah and Hamas leaderships in Mecca, which culminated in understandings on the basis for a unity government, concluded a series of talks between the movements that had taken place intermittently since the Hamas government was sworn in and that accelerated following

the publication of the “National Conciliation Document” drafted in May 2006 by Palestinian inmates of Israeli prisons. The talks were cut off in June following escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, when the IDF embarked on an extensive operation in the Gaza Strip designed to secure the release of an Israeli soldier who was kidnapped from Israeli territory on the Gaza border, and in order to halt rocket fire on the western Negev. Against this backdrop, the institutional disintegration in the Palestinian Authority

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(PA) accelerated and clashes between Fatah and Hamas street forces intensified. The leaderships of both movements encountered growing public criticism for their failure to exploit the Israeli withdrawal from the Strip to create a functional governing system. They were both called upon to join forces in order to end the inter-organizational clashes, contain the aggression against Israel that prompted severe retaliation, and formulate a joint political platform that would lead to the lifting of the economic boycott of the Palestinian Authority.¹ An errant shell fired by the IDF on November 8, 2006, during an operation designed to stop the artillery fire from the Gaza Strip, killed twenty-three civilians in Beit Hanoun and spurred the renewal of Fatah-Hamas talks. After three months, with inter-Arab support and under the auspices of Saudi Arabia, the discussions concluded with a set of principles for political coordination and a division of institutional authority.²

Internal organizational pressures, which helped galvanize renewal of the talks, had intensified as the PA deteriorated. Until 1993, Palestinian politics were characterized by a leadership based abroad and an institutional system that emerged in the territories. The arrival of leading figures from the outside leadership to the territories ostensibly turned the Palestinian arena into a bipolar system, although in practice it became a system of four poles. The principal axes are the Fatah movement and – or rather, versus – the Hamas movement. Both movements have external branches that compete with the internal leadership for influence and are linked to local elements that challenge the “inside” leadership. In addition, there are factions and groups in the territories that due to the weakening of the central system have assem-

bled independent operational capabilities and political agendas.

Through President Abbas, Fatah is clinging to the residue of its power strongholds in the territories, though emerging as little more than a pale reminder of a glorious past. In recent years the movement has turned into a loose network of cells and camps that lends symbolic support for a leadership that is incapable of spearheading a political or civilian agenda. Members of the movement’s intermediate generation have called for organizational reform that would reflect their own rising influence. Departing from Abbas, the head of the PLO’s political wing Farouq Qadoumi and members of the movement’s intermediate generation have advocated cooperation with Hamas, even if it does not meet the terms set out by President Abbas and the Quartet: to stop terror activities, recognize Israel, and honor agreements signed in the past by Israel and the PLO.

The Hamas movement, whose organizational framework is more clearly defined, is also contending with internal tension. Khaled Mashal, head of the Damascus-based political bureau, is striving to weaken the movement’s internal leadership en route to assuming the PA presidency and eventual possible control of the PLO as well. In control of the movement’s funds, Mashal played a decisive role in delaying Hamas’ consent to demands made by Abbas as a condition for cooperation between the movements, which included recognition of the March 2002 Arab peace initiative and the UN resolutions on the Israeli-Arab conflict. Elements in Hamas’ military wing, under instruction from Damascus, are conducting an aggressive policy that opposes the moderate course that Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh is trying to steer in order to allow the Hamas government to con-





solidate its position. However, Mashal too is wary of both overstepping the line whereby Hamas will not gain from escalating the conflict with Israel, and aggravating the collapse of the institutional system in the territories. This caution sheds light on the messages he has conveyed: agreement on the release of the kidnapped Israeli soldier if Israel complies with terms that Hamas dictates, and his repeated proposal for a long term ceasefire (*hudna*) – albeit with an adamant refusal to recognize Israel – contingent on Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. This latter proposal, as well as his consent to include Fatah in the government, indicates that Mashal is not looking to escalate the confrontation with Israel and intensify the inter-organizational rivalry at all costs. Rather he is aiming to create the setting that would allow Hamas to consolidate its power and manage ensuing developments in both the Palestinian and the Israeli-Palestinian spheres.

The hope that bolstering the internal forces would counterbalance the inciting impact of “outside” elements introduced momentum to the talks that resumed between President Abbas and Prime Minister Haniyeh after the grave Beit Hanoun incident. The talks attempted to distinguish carefully between the mass of background voices, specifically, between the calls for blatant revenge – which would mean escalating the confrontation – and calls to forsake the rigid dogmatic principles and entrenched positions of power for the collective benefit. Another goal of the unity government was the lifting of the economic boycott of the PA. Fatah and Hamas – more individually than together – needed an influx of funds and public support as acknowledgment of success in removing the sanctions imposed on the PA following the establishment of the Hamas government.

The talks were persistently encouraged by Egypt and Jordan, which are highly concerned about the potential spillover of internal Palestinian tension. Saudi Arabia and Qatar were also involved in mediating attempts between the camps, including an effort to limit the growing influence of Iran on Hamas via economic support.³ In the greater international arena there was likewise support for the talks, and thus in the course of 2006, against a backdrop of the escalating Israeli-Palestinian violence and the deterioration of the economic situation in the territories, international opposition to talks with a potential unity government weakened significantly. The European Union even promised explicitly to seriously consider lifting the sanctions if a unity government were established. Such expressions spurred inter-organizational talks, as the economic and political gains expected to be achieved through a unity government were designed to compensate both Fatah and Hamas for the tension that would intensify within their ranks following the respective concessions required to translate the idea into practice.

In addition, the establishment of a unity government could portend the opening of communication channels with countries that shunned Hamas before and after its government was worn in. Dialogue could even progress to a point where insistence on Hamas’ explicit recognition of Israel’s right to exist as a condition for lifting the sanctions would be abandoned. However, the UN, the United States, Britain, and the European Union have insisted that President Abbas is the Palestinian partner and adhered to demands they made of Hamas as a condition for political dialogue. This position did not change following the agreement between Fatah and Hamas on a unity government, as

the text did not include explicit recognition of Israel by Hamas, only willingness to honor – though not “to adopt” – agreements signed by the PLO in the past. The commitment of the US administration to the conditions set by the Quartet and to reinforcing Abbas was demonstrated by the transfer of funds and weapons to Fatah forces, and by training of units of the Presidential Guard. The arms were transferred via Egypt, with Israeli approval. Congress approved a decision to prohibit the transfer of aid to the PA as long as Hamas adheres to the violent struggle and its refusal to recognize Israel, and in January 2007 President Bush instructed the State Department to transfer approximately \$86 million to the Palestinian security forces controlled by President Abbas.⁴

In reality, however, the economic boycott has weakened over time. Following the Beit Hanoun disaster members of the Arab League announced they would stop honoring the boycott.⁵ Cracks also began to appear on the Quartet front. The European Union transferred funds without Hamas modifying its stance on Israel. The forum that convened in Washington in February 2007 expressed support for President Abbas, and Hamas was again asked to comply with the terms presented to it with the creation of its government; yet prior to the assembly the Russian foreign minister called for rescinding the boycott on the Hamas government. A similar call came in a report drafted by a British parliamentary committee that examined the situation in the territories one year after Hamas’ victory in the Legislative Council elections.⁶

In view of the impasse between Fatah and Hamas over the months, the focus of the talks gradually diminished to cover only matters that were deemed even more urgent than

the need to alleviate the economic pressure on the PA: tensions between the movements manifested by the security deterioration in the Palestinian arena itself, and the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation.

Since the Hamas electoral victory, the violent confrontation between the Fatah and Hamas street forces has become the most urgent issue on the public agenda in the territories. The struggle has been focused in the Gaza Strip where there have been exchanges of fire, assassinations of leading activists, kidnappings, and attacks on economic and organizational infrastructures of both movements. These have become routine. Such events, as well as mass demonstrations by Hamas and Fatah, have spilled over to the West Bank, although on a smaller scale and with less severity than in Gaza. The growing confrontation has sparked repeated attempts at defusing the tension, and Haniyeh and Abbas have agreed several times on a ceasefire. The last occasion before the Mecca agreement was drafted on January 30, 2007, following incidents in which thirty-four people were killed, 120 were injured, and about forty were kidnapped.⁷

Nonetheless, Hamas activists, deployed in a militia of about 6,000 men, are determined to gain control of the Gaza street.⁸ For their part, many Fatah activists do not agree with Abbas’ wish to stabilize the arena through inter-movement dialogue. Leading Fatah’s militant approach is Muhammad Dahlan, a former head of the PA’s preventive security apparatus in the Gaza Strip and a prominent member of the movement’s intermediate generation. The popular army that he is trying to assemble and organize is intended as a counter force to the Hamas militia. An effort will be made within the framework of the unity government to join all the armed

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groups into a national force, although it is doubtful whether such moves will quickly and comprehensively temper the militant atmosphere in Gaza.⁹

Another issue agreed upon by Abbas and Haniyeh, which assumed more urgency in light of the Beit Hanoun incident, was the need to remove Israeli military pressure. In line with an Egyptian-Saudi proposal, the leaderships of Hamas and Fatah agreed to differentiate between stalled talks on a joint political platform and immediate action to moderate the armed conflict. Representatives of various Palestinian factions accepted calls from Abbas for a ceasefire. Mashal supported Hamas' joining the initiative. In response to Abbas' announcement on the morning of November 26, 2006, whereby the factions agreed to desist from rocket fire from the Gaza Strip to the Negev, suicide attacks, and digging tunnels to smuggle arms into the Strip, and in view of the continuing failure to stop rocket fire from Gaza by massive military means, Israel accepted the ceasefire and withdrew its forces from the Strip.

Ceasefire, For Now

Given the months-long efforts by Fatah and Hamas to achieve political common ground, there was growing anxiety that Hamas would exploit a unity government and any subsequent ease in economic pressure to advance "the strategy of phases." However, intentions to establish a unity government were not the root of Israel's problem. Hamas and other organized parties in the PA have in any event been heavily engaged in an arms race. The guidelines that have anchored Hamas' struggle against Israel since its inception were augmented in the summer of 2006 by the call to prepare for an escalation in the confrontation, modeled after the

way Hizbollah's force was built and used in its war with the IDF in Lebanon. The intended escalation was manifested by accelerated military deployment that did not need the war in Lebanon as a source of inspiration. This deployment, which included integration of field activist cells in a quasi-military framework was also designed to act as a deterrent against attempts by Fatah-aligned security forces to impinge on the movement's freedom of action.

In any case, the unity government will not stop the inter-organizational power struggle in the territories in one fell swoop. If the ceasefire declared at the end of November collapses, the violent expressions of the struggle will continue and spill over from the Palestinian arena into the Israeli-Palestinian sphere. With regard to the possible lifting of the economic sanctions imposed on the PA, this is also a trend that emerged irrespective of establishing a unity government or Hamas' potential agreement to the terms of the Quartet. In other words, the risks that Israel faces following the establishment of the unity government are the same as those it would face in any event.

A ceasefire, such as was formulated in November, does not remove these risks. The disintegration of the institutional frameworks in the territories, primarily evident in Fatah's domain, has also been experienced by Hamas. The plan to create a unity government and even its actual execution do not disguise or counter the weak control by both movements' leaderships of the various factions. The tension between the two movements, the limitations of their authority in the field, and the unauthorized possession of arms in the territories all act as a hindrance to enforcement, even if there is agreement on division of resources and authority.

Following the November ceasefire announcement, Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert declared that Israel will exercise restraint in order to support implementation of the ceasefire.¹⁰ Israel also expressed to Abbas readiness to alleviate the military pressure in the West Bank in order to expand the geographical area covered by the relative calm. However, between Israel and the Palestinians there are different understandings of the terms that indicate observation of the ceasefire. For Israel, ongoing adherence to the calm is a condition for cessation of military activity in the territories – and for formulating a future political agenda. Militant Palestinian activists, on the other hand, made the calm conditional on a general cessation of Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Right from the early days of the ceasefire the IDF conducted operations against activists in the West Bank, providing the Islamic Jihad with a pretext to continue rocket fire from the Strip.¹¹ From the onset of the ceasefire and up to the end of January 2007, there was a sharp decline in the scale of rocket fire.¹² Yet on January 29 there was a suicide attack in Eilat by a member of the Islamic Jihad.¹³ The attack took place against a background of intensified clashes between Fatah and Hamas activists in Gaza and, according to those responsible for planning the attack, it was designed as a reminder to the rival camps that they should desist from their internal struggle and focus on the struggle against Israel.

Despite public pressure to respond to the continued firing on the Negev, the Israeli government adhered to its “restraint.” Nevertheless, on January 27 Prime Minister Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz modified the policy and approved a “targeted operation” against rocket launchers at the time of launching. Following the terror attack in Ei-

lat the security heads agreed to maintain the restraint, although the IDF was instructed to take localized action against the infrastructure of the Islamic Jihad in Gaza. Over time the extent of the ceasefire decreased and assumed the form of sporadic but ongoing systematic disruptions by the Palestinians, and focused counter operations in Gaza and the West Bank by Israel. Under these conditions, it is questionable whether the understandings reached by the Fatah and Hamas leaders as a basis for a unity government will prevent activists from more attempts to rekindle the struggle. Furthermore, without a concentrated effort at enforcement by the leading camps in the PA, the day is not far off when the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Abbas will become an empty commitment.

In order to limit the possibility of armed militants in the territories renewing the cycle of violence and dragging Israel into a response, Israel should aim to coordinate the principles of the ceasefire with Palestinian parties that have enforcement capabilities – even if limited – and thereby advance a situation where the benefits of calm are manifested in the territories. In view of the changes that have occurred in recent years in the inter-organizational balance of power in the Palestinian arena – the weakening of Fatah, the simultaneous rise in power of Hamas, and particularly the creation of a unity government – it will not be possible to progress towards achieving these objectives without security coordination with an extended Palestinian representative body, which also includes Hamas representation. Indirect and clandestine dialogue between Israel and Hamas, which took place over several months in an effort to secure the release of the soldier who was kidnapped in June, was acceptable within Israeli public

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opinion. Direct talks with Hamas, before the conditions set by Israel and the Quartet are met by the movement's leadership, will undoubtedly encounter public opposition and will be interpreted in the international arena as a change in policy that invites rescinding the boycott. However, the Israeli government should weigh the significance of these impediments against the cost of another round of violence. Hamas has already committed to President Abbas to maintain calm. Dialogue between Israel and an extended Palestinian representative body, authorized by a unity government, will add credence to this commitment. This message should help the decision makers in Israel moderate the expected public opposition to relieving the military and economic pressure on the PA in response to an ongoing and proven enforcement effort.¹⁴

A positive government experience, which would be facilitated by a substantial easing of the Israeli siege on the territories in return for a systematic Palestinian effort to enforce security and calm, would possibly bolster the pragmatic approach within Hamas that was recently reflected in its willingness to relax the struggle against Israel. One may also expect translation of this pragmatism into political moderation to win public support in the territories, particularly if Hamas commands this policy as part of a unity government, and if it is also accompanied by rehabilitation measures made possible by a relaxation of the economic and military pressure applied by Israel while the security calm is maintained.¹⁵ Aiming to achieve dialogue with a unified Palestinian representation is necessary not only in order to afford the ceasefire announced in November a chance to survive, but also to try and pave the way to a long-term armistice. As a precondition,

the Palestinian force would operate under strict international control. Moderation of the Israeli position on the PA would likely bolster the demand to renew and even extend international supervision of the use of aid received in any case in the territories. International support for an agreed armistice – in other words, making aid to the PA conditional on maintaining comprehensive and ongoing calm, and in particular, the heightened effort of the Egyptian authorities to stop the smuggling of arms into the Gaza Strip – would hinder deployment for a future round of the confrontation and would further reduce the already limited practicality of the “strategy of phases.”

Can Hamas be a partner to talks with Israel? Messages conveyed by Hamas spokesmen in this context are not unequivocal. Alongside calls for the destruction of Israel, there have over the years been repeated calls for a *hudna*. Recently, such expressions have been augmented – albeit conditionally – by a readiness to enforce a ceasefire among all the factions, and the demand for Israel's full withdrawal to the 1967 borders is not always mentioned as a precondition. When unity talks were in progress the Hamas government's foreign minister, Mahmoud a-Zahar, declared that the movement would not recognize Israel or Security Council Resolution 242, although he added that Hamas would oppose any renewal of the political process if the source of Palestinian authority was the PLO and not the Legislative Council, where Hamas enjoys a large majority.¹⁶ In January 2007, Mashal diverted opposition to recognition of Israel from the ideological sphere to the practical area when he declared that Israel is a “fact” and a Palestinian state, when it comes about, would be able to recognize it officially. The platform of the unity govern-

ment does not include official recognition of Israel, but it does include a commitment “to honor” the agreements signed by the PLO. Thus, the Hamas leadership did not retreat from its principles entirely, but there has been a discernible change in them, at least in terms of declarations. The Hamas drive to change the PLO’s structure to reflect its own rise in status does not detract from its recently-signaled pragmatic approach. Alongside the traditional message, an approach is emerging in Hamas that does not entirely rule out dialogue with Israel, rather highlights both the political-territorial conditions that would allow such dialogue to take place and the intra-Palestinian question of national representation.

For now, renewal of the political dialogue between Israel and the PA is not on the agenda. On the one hand, the stagnation relieves Hamas and all its various wings of discussing compromises that would endanger the cohesiveness of the movement. On the other hand, Hamas’ political objection defers the day when the Israeli government will be called upon to address ideological and territorial concessions. From Israel’s standpoint, President Abbas remains a partner for talks. On December 23, 2006, Olmert and Abbas convened, the first meeting between an Israeli prime minister and Palestinian president in almost two years. In accordance with Olmert’s promise to Abbas, Israel transferred to the Palestinian Authority 100 million shekels of the Palestinians’ tax revenue that was held by Israel. In addition, the promise given to Abbas to ease civilian movement in the West Bank has also been partially kept. However, Abbas’ institutional weakness, the estrangement between Israel and Hamas, and the continuing breaches of the ceasefire made it impossible to view the December meeting as

the start of a process with a clear orientation. In any case, there are considerable differences of opinion between Israel and Abbas with regard to the nature of the process in the future. Israel adheres to the roadmap, while Abbas objects to a temporary arrangement, which lies at the heart of the roadmap.¹⁷

Nonetheless and precisely because of the political stagnation, Fatah and Hamas expressed interest in security-related calm in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. This was indicated by the ceasefire announced in November. Both leaderships acted with no less sense of urgency to calm tensions in the Palestinian arena by formulating principles for a coalition government, demonstrated by the manifesto formulated in Mecca. And overall, the establishment of the unity government constitutes an opportunity. Such a government could provide a basis for a central authority to preserve calm in the Palestinian arena, as well as in the Israeli-Palestinian. Israel would be able to try and promote progress in this direction. A first step could be recognition of the PA and all its various components with regard to security coordination.

Conclusion

Establishment of the unity government will not eradicate the Palestinian internal contest for leadership, and neither will it guarantee immediate and comprehensive implementation of security calm in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. Nevertheless, the possibility of improving the chances of consolidating the Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire, reached in November by President and Hamas and then agreed on by Abbas and Israel, should be examined through security coordination between Israel and an official Palestinian team that would include Hamas representatives. A Palestinian unity government may serve

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as a basis for putting together such a team.

The potential use of the ceasefire by Hamas and other factions to redeploy for continuing the struggle against Israel is a real danger. However, the immediate dangers and long term threats – which may result from Hamas' continued civilian and military consolidation, against a background of social and economic crisis in the territories and the unchecked empowerment of militants while the central government collapses – are present even without any alleviation of the military and economic pressure applied by Israel. In order to curb such threats Israel should try to offer the PA the possibility of rehabilitating itself, first and foremost by means of security coordination with the leading forces there. An agreed ceasefire would allow Israel the option to re-impose economic sanctions and a military siege on the PA if it is not fully implemented. On the other hand, without bolstering the ceasefire by taking steps that would strengthen the interest of Hamas and the PA as a whole in governmental consolidation and civilian rehabilitation, the possibility of controlling the existing and developing threats will dissipate. The option of renewing the political dialogue might disappear as well.

Notes

1. According to a public opinion poll conducted in the territories, around 46 percent of respondents supported the creation of a unity government that would be equally divided between Fatah and Hamas. See Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 21, The Palestinian Center for Policy, Survey Research Unit, September 2006: 14-16. See also "Fierce Criticism in the Palestinian Press of the Factions, Leaders and Internal Violence," MEMRI, October 24, 2006.
2. According to the agreement, Ismail Haniyeh will continue to serve as prime minister; the government will include nine Hamas ministers, six members of Fatah, five independent officials, and four from other factions.
3. Saudi Arabia promised to provide the unity Palestinian government with aid of half a billion dollars.
4. In light of the challenges facing the United States in Iraq, the threat posed by the Iranian nuclear program, and the change in the balance of power in Congress in favor of the Democrats, calls are being made within the administration to accept the results of the democratic process in the Palestinian Authority, in order to lower the profile of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the framework of the dilemmas the US faces in the Middle East. It is quite possible that the idea of lifting sanctions from Iran and Syria will be complemented by revision of the boycott policy. This trend may gain momentum if the unity government begins to function, and in view of the continuing ceasefire in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. Hamas spokesmen are limiting willingness to reach an understanding with Israel to security aspects, as indicated by the proposal for a long term ceasefire. Still, dialogue with the United States may benefit Hamas if and when dialogue with Israel emerges or is imposed. As preparation for such a development, Hamas may follow the example of the PLO by seeking ties with the United States, as the major – if not the only – international element that can apply effective pressure on Israel.
5. The PA's revenue has declined by about 60 percent since March 2006. Between April and September the PA received about \$500 million (compared with \$1.2 billion in the same period of 2005). Most of the drop in revenue was caused by the delay in the transfer of taxes (about \$360 million) held by Israel. Most of the aid provided – about \$300 million – came from Arab states. Most was given directly to President Abbas and helped pay salaries to PA public servants, and this alleviated the pressure on the Hamas government (*Jerusalem Post*, Online Edition, November 2, 2006). In an address to participants at the economic convention in Davos at the end of January 2007, President Abbas said that 79 percent of people in the Gaza Strip live below the poverty line,

- and the GDP in the Palestinian Authority is below \$800 per capita (Haaretz.co.il, January 28, 2007).
6. "Development Assistance and the Occupied Palestinian Territories," see: Aljazeera.net, January 31, 2007.
 7. Haaretz.co.il, January 31, 2007.
 8. According to findings of a public opinion poll conducted in the territories by Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No. 22, The Palestinian Center for Policy, Survey Research Unit, published on December 17, 2006, if new elections to the Legislative Council were held, Hamas would win 36 percent of the votes and Fatah would take 42 percent. Satisfaction with Hamas' government fell to 33 percent, compared with 42 percent just three months earlier. However, satisfaction with President Abbas fell to just 40 percent, compared with 55 percent only three months earlier.
 9. The Hamas and Fatah leaderships responded positively to an Egyptian proposal to establish a joint military force that will reflect unity efforts and will help to curb militant activities. See *Middle East Newsline (menl)* 9, no. 43, January 31 2007. Hamas' and Fatah's adherence to this plan was reflected in the decision within the agreement on a unity government to appoint an independent minister of the interior.
 10. Haaretz.co.il, November 27, 2006.
 11. "Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades convey a message to Hamas: Every time our people are attacked in Gaza you will pay a heavy price here, in the West Bank.," Avi Issacharoff, "Mid-day at Manra Square," Haaretz.co.il, December 15, 2006.
 12. In November 2006, 157 rockets were fired, fifty rockets were fired in December, and thirty in January. See "News of the Israeli-Palestinian Confrontation, 16-31 January 2007," The Intelligence Heritage Center, Intelligence and Terror Information Center.
 13. Responsibility for the attack was assumed by al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which is associated with Fatah.
 14. According to a public opinion poll conducted in December 2006, 58 percent of Israelis supported contacts with Hamas leaders if the organization released the kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit (Tami Steimetz Center for Peace Research, the Peace Index, January 9, 2007).
 15. A public opinion poll conducted by al-Najah University in Nablus indicated that a large part of the Palestinian public (61 percent) believe that Qassam rocket fire harms the Palestinian national struggle, or does not bring benefits. 65.7 percent of those asked expressed support for limiting the violent struggle against Israel to the West Bank (Ynet, November 19, 2006).
 16. Ynet, November 12, 2006.
 17. Abbas rejected the idea of a temporary Palestinian state that was raised by Haniyeh together with his proposal of a ten-year armistice.