

Israel and the Palestinian Authority: When Parallel Lines Might Converge

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Skepticism regarding the chances of formulating an historic compromise, fostered by a long series of failures to achieve this end, has eroded the willingness of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to return to the negotiating table. In recent years, differences between the sides on opening conditions for talks, and indeed, the very purpose of the talks, have magnified this fundamental obstacle to resumption of the dialogue. The PA demanded, *inter alia*, a complete freeze on Israeli construction in the West Bank as a condition for returning to negotiations, and it also demanded that discussions begin with the question of borders. Israel, for its part, has called for a resumption of dialogue without preconditions, although it has also demanded that the issue of security arrangements be placed at the top of the agenda. Looking ahead, it has conditioned the conclusion of an agreement on Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. In January 2012, meetings were held between Israeli representatives and the PA, hosted by Jordan and sponsored by the Quartet, for the purpose of finding common ground for resuming the talks. However, it is doubtful that these meetings will evolve to become formative milestones on the road to breaking the prolonged stalemate and settling the conflict.

The impasse has commonly been dubbed a “political freeze.” Nevertheless, the word “freeze” is far from describing relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Indeed, the conflict theater is as dynamic as ever, notwithstanding the lack of progress toward a settlement and the decelerated pace of the PA’s march toward international recognition of

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Palestinian independence. Ironically, it is precisely the political stalemate that has clarified issues that Israel and the Palestinians should have a joint interest in addressing and rethinking.

Deadlock

In recent years the Palestinian Authority, in its stronghold in the West Bank, has concentrated on construction and rehabilitation in key areas, namely, security, economics, and governance. This undertaking, which is supported by extensive international economic and institutional aid, is intended to strengthen the PA's domestic position. Through its achievements, the PA has sought to demonstrate to residents of both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that it is able to offer them a better present and greater hope for the future, certainly more than what Hamas is offering to the population under its control. At the same time, in the absence of a basis for restarting concrete negotiations with Israel, the PA pinned its hopes on the international community and initiated a well-orchestrated campaign to garner international support for Palestinian independence.

The Palestinian Authority submitted a request on this matter to the United Nations when the General Assembly met in September 2011. The request was intended to demonstrate political activity and create a fresh basis for international pressure on Israel, which would perhaps even include an attempt to impose a settlement on Israel.¹ If this were to happen, the PA would be freed from the need to justify concessions to Israel in the face of the expected public protest at home. Indeed, even agreeing to borders on the basis of the 1967 lines and the division of Jerusalem is likely to be interpreted as an historic concession that the PA is not authorized or entitled to make. Nonetheless, the PA was forced to acknowledge that the request to the Security Council to recognize a Palestinian state would not be approved, at least not at the current time.² In the months preceding the General Assembly meeting, Israeli diplomacy focused on frustrating the PA's intention to bring the recognition issue to a vote. However, the Palestinians' disappointment was not an Israeli achievement, rather, the result of opposition by the US administration and its intention to veto any positive decision on the matter.

At the same time that the government of Israel attempted to thwart the Palestinian Authority's diplomatic ambitions, it was careful to

maintain ongoing security cooperation with Palestinian security forces operating in the West Bank. This cooperation focused on the battle against opposition forces that were seeking to escalate the conflict with Israel, mainly Hamas activists. Israel continued to support economic development in the West Bank, further cultivating Benjamin Netanyahu's "economic peace" option, which is supposed to quell the impetus toward a violent struggle. Even so, this policy did not soften the criticism Israel received for the obstacles it placed in the way of reviving the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority. And indeed, Israel was the main target of the international demand to resume the dialogue. Though the pressure was felt even before the wave of popular uprisings in the Middle East began in late 2010, it increased because of the turmoil, which intensified international interest in stabilizing the region. In this context, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority were asked to return to the negotiating table and thereby do their part to reduce points of regional friction.

When Palestinian momentum at the UN slowed down, there was a sense in the international arena that hopes of reinvigorating the Israeli-Palestinian political process had ebbed. Since the failure of the proximity talks between Israel and the PA, launched under American auspices in 2008 and broken off when war between Israel and Hamas erupted in Gaza in late 2008, the Obama administration has avoided proposing a formal program for negotiations. It can be assumed that it will continue to do so – especially during a presidential campaign – as long as sweeping Arab support for negotiations is not assured, and certainly as long as a breakthrough in relations between Israel and the PA is not assured. The Quartet has not presented a new negotiations proposal either, but on September 23, 2011, toward the end of the General Assembly, it issued a call to the sides to restart the dialogue within three months. The Palestinian Authority responded by expressing willingness to suspend actions in international forums to give resumption of negotiations a chance, though in practice its contacts with international bodies continued. For his part, Prime Minister Netanyahu answered the call by confirming Israel's readiness to return to the negotiating table.³ And indeed, in early 2012, toward the end of the period allocated by the Quartet for renewing negotiations, representatives of the sides met in Amman. This meeting, the first in a series whose purpose was to formulate a joint platform for dialogue and which ended a period of some three years of severed

contact between the sides, did not raise expectations of real progress toward a settlement. In the background could be heard the declaration by Mahmoud Abbas that the Palestinian Authority does not intend to forego a freeze on settlements as a condition for resuming the dialogue, and that in light of the failure of the Quartet-sponsored talks, the PA would intensify its diplomatic and legal moves in the international arena.⁴

In any case, it appears that the heightened regional instability, the rising power of the masses in Middle Eastern countries, and the rapid increase in the strength of political Islam in the region have only made the conditions under which Israel and the Palestinian Authority might once again attempt to break the deadlock much more difficult. Beyond ideological dictates and political reservations, the fear that public protest will erupt among the Palestinians, inspired by the assertiveness shown by the masses in neighboring countries, will make it difficult for the PA to retreat from rigid bargaining positions. The government of Israel will likewise find it difficult to approve additional territorial redeployment in the West Bank. Its willingness to take electoral risks by executing a

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withdrawal and an evacuation of settlements, which in any case is limited, will be further reduced by the fear that security threats will be exacerbated by regional radicalization. The Arab regimes' awareness of the strength of the "street" and the proven attractiveness of political Islam are expected to limit their willingness to back a settlement. This would be the case even if the PA responded favorably to an international demand or to a pragmatic call by Israel to return to the negotiating table.

Status Report

With the loss of momentum in the international arena, the Palestinian Authority continued to invest most of its resources in rehabilitating institutions in the West Bank. These efforts are

underway both in preparation for future sovereignty and as political ammunition for the PA, as it copes with the erosion in its position given the bleak political horizon. Indeed, from time to time Palestinian

spokesmen have threatened that if there is no concrete progress toward independence the PA will be dismantled and will abandon the West Bank to total Israeli control.⁵ Nevertheless, the PA's ongoing efforts to consolidate its domestic power as well as its international standing are not consistent with any sign of self-dissolution. Like any state authority or political party, the Palestinian Authority does not represent only an ideological idea or political strategy; it is a body that also unites personal and organizational interests, especially those of Fatah. Dismantling the PA would constitute an admission of an historic failure, with a high personal and collective price.⁶

Efforts by the Palestinian Authority to regulate its relations with Hamas should be seen in this light. The agreement of understandings between Fatah and Hamas was formulated under Egyptian auspices and signed in Cairo in May 2011. The so-called "national reconciliation" agreement was a fundamental prescription for institutional coordination between the rival camps, which are far from genuine reconciliation and are determined to continue to vie for supremacy among the Palestinians. The understandings they reached focused on the intention to establish a temporary government that would prepare for elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council and the presidency, that is, to test, through elections, the balance of power between Fatah and Hamas as it has taken shape in recent years. By means of the election plan, the PA sought to strengthen its democratic image in preparation for the UN vote.

Given the delay in the Palestinian Authority's moves at the UN, the PA once again senses the indispensability of its popular support base, which set in motion past attempts to regulate inter-organizational relationships. Furthermore, as a result of the political impasse and the harsh international criticism of Israel, the PA leadership assessed correctly that its international standing would not be harmed by a rapprochement with Hamas. As for Hamas, its political leadership assessed that institutional coordination with the Palestinian Authority will aid it in extending its influence beyond the borders of the Gaza Strip.⁷ At the same time, the weakening of the Bashar al-Assad regime and

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Hamas' fear of losing its stronghold in Damascus, which was validated in December 2011, prodded the organization to draw closer to Cairo and attempt to use the increasing strength of the Islamic camp in Egypt to consolidate its position. Hamas therefore agreed to the Egyptian demand to sign understandings with Fatah.

Nonetheless, it is doubtful that the rival camps will succeed in coordinating with each other in a way that will allow elections to be held in May 2012 as scheduled.⁸ Mahmoud Abbas demanded that Salam Fayyad remain head of the provisional government in order to continue to control the division of Palestinian Authority resources. This same interest was the basis for Hamas' opposition to the demand. Aside from the dispute on this issue, it is expected that both sides will be deterred from holding elections by their inability to assure their own victory. It was international players, mainly the United States and the European Union, eager to see Palestinian institutional reform and democratization, which urged the PA to hold elections in January 2006. Yet this time it appears that external actors, excluding Egypt, will not insist that elections be held as long as they are not convinced that Fatah, which is committed to the political process, will form the next government.

Even if elections are held, their results and the prospects of establishing a national unity government are difficult to predict. In 2006, Fatah rejected the Hamas offer to join the government because it meant transferring the Ministry of the Interior, that is, control of the PA's security apparatus, to Hamas. The unity government established in 2007 under pressure from Egypt and Saudi Arabia was short lived because disputes between the camps, including over relations with Israel and the political process, continued, and they overshadowed the benefits inherent in institutional coordination. Hamas' determination to reject the Quartet's preconditions for dialogue – recognition of Israel, cessation of violence, and recognition of agreements signed in the past between Israel and the PLO – prevented the unity government from formulating a political platform that would allow the resumption of negotiations with Israel. The resulting Israeli and international boycott of the Palestinian Authority brought about the end of the government. Yet again, it is most likely that establishment of both a provisional government that will prepare for elections in 2012 and a government based on election results will be delayed.

For his part, Abbas informed representatives of Palestinian factions that the establishment of a provisional government was dependent on the Quartet's agreement, that is, on eliminating the danger of a boycott of the PA. He also expressed reservations about the prospects of a unity government with Hamas, lest it provide Israel with another justification, as he put it, for the absence of political contact.⁹ In turn, Hamas political bureau head Khaled Mashal declared that from now on the organization's activists would focus on the popular struggle. However, the denial by a Hamas spokesman that a decision had been made to change the movement's modus operandi testified to the growing friction between the wing headed by Mashal, based outside of Gaza, and the Gaza-based leadership under Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh. In January 2012 the Hamas leadership announced that Mashal planned to resign from the Hamas leadership, and subsequently – and without coordinating with the Haniyeh camp – Mashal agreed to appoint Abbas as head of the provisional government. Further evidence of the evolving rivalry and controversy in Hamas ranks was a declaration by Mahmoud a-Zahar. According to a-Zahar, in contrast to the message originating with Fatah to the effect that Mashal and Abbas had agreed that the struggle against Israel would continue by non-violent means in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Hamas did not intend to cease the violent struggle in Gaza and from Gaza.¹⁰ Moreover, while Abbas stated that Hamas and Fatah had agreed to pursue establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, Haniyeh declared there was no change in the organization's guiding strategic goal. Haniyeh thus reinforced the concern that from Hamas' point of view, establishment of a Palestinian state would be nothing more than a step on the way to implementing the strategy of stages in the struggle against Israel. In so doing, he added a stumbling block on the path to establishing a Palestinian government that includes Hamas but would still be a candidate for negotiations.¹¹

Israeli spokespersons, like their Palestinian counterparts, have repeatedly assigned responsibility for the break in the political process to the other side. In addition, Israel countered the PA's moves with measures of a punitive nature. Israel's response to the plan for institutional coordination between Fatah and Hamas was to stop the transfer of tax revenues to the PA, though the funds were released under international pressure after the EU expressed its willingness to compensate the PA

for losses it would incur because of the delay in the payments. Prime Minister Netanyahu and other spokesmen also warned that Israel would take unilateral measures in response to international recognition of a Palestinian state. In keeping with this line, Israel's response to the PA's acceptance into UNESCO in October 2011 was again to stop the transfer of tax revenues, although they were released following international criticism and under pressure from the United States.¹² Building permits for projects in the Jerusalem area issued in November 2011 were likewise presented as a unilateral response to the PA's unilateral application to UNESCO. However, the government of Israel retracted this statement because of its absurdity; after all, building in the West Bank has continued for years, whether there was a political process or not and irrespective of the PA's ties with international institutions.¹³ The issue reappeared in the headlines in December 2011, following another report about the Housing Ministry's intention to expand construction beyond the Green Line, including in Jerusalem. As a result of international condemnation, a denial was again issued about the connection between construction and the PA's diplomatic moves, with the addition of the familiar statement that building would continue in neighborhoods that will remain under Israeli sovereignty according to any realistic outline of a future settlement.¹⁴

Points of Convergence?

Israel and the Palestinian Authority repeatedly stress their fundamental commitment to a permanent settlement based on the partition of mandatory Palestine into two states. Yet public opinion considerations and political calculations, in addition to security and economic concerns, feed the perception on both sides that the gaps in their positions are insurmountable, which delays the resumption of purposeful dialogue between them. As a result, it appears that both Israel and the PA are acting contrary to their stated intentions and their strategic interests, at least on the level of formal pronouncements.

The longer the deadlock continues and the longer a Palestinian state is not established, the more Israel distances itself from what it demands that the PA recognize as a condition for an agreement: Israel as a Jewish state.¹⁵ Furthermore, the continuing centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the regional agenda threatens Israel with a deterioration in relations with Arab states and reduces the chance of establishing

constructive ties with them, even on the basis of a cold peace and non-belligerence. Although the lack of progress in the political process is not at the top of Israel's public agenda, the government's approach to this issue is a target of harsh political and media criticism. Israel is also risking further erosion in its international standing by maintaining its image as the party that refuses concessions and rejects a settlement.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority clings to rigid opening conditions for negotiations, which delay its path to an independent state. Its inability to change the political reality, whether through negotiations with Israel or through the UN, threatens it with a loss of domestic authority and standing, as well as the loss of international status. After all, the legal basis for its existence and its political legitimacy is commitment to a compromise that will involve establishment of a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders. The PA also needs negotiations with Israel, even if it is only a dialogue concluding with partial understandings and a "shelf plan," to realize the promise of independence and garner public support, which would obstruct Hamas' drive to become the supreme Palestinian ruling authority.

Thus, domestic-political, diplomatic-international, and long term strategic considerations should guide the government of Israel and the PA to keep their commitment to a settlement and to direct dialogue on the agenda. In order for declarations of intention on this issue not to lose their significance and their power of persuasion, Israel and the PA would do well to help each other return to the negotiating table.

As became clear yet again in the meetings in Amman in January 2012, it is difficult to overcome basic differences. The two sides will therefore have to focus on strengthening the security and economic arrangements that have served as the basis of their interaction in recent years, with a not-insignificant degree of consistency and success, and give them renewed public affirmation. This would validate the interim situation that has been ongoing for years, and on a daily basis is apparently not entirely uncomfortable for both sides. Given the PA's fundamental opposition to

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the term “interim” and to the idea of an “interim agreement,” especially one not anchored in a binding plan and a timetable for a permanent settlement, it would be a mistake for Israel to insist on calling it by this name and would, in fact, invite rejection.

Moreover, it is possible that a gesture by Israel, first and foremost, a “quiet” freeze on construction in the West Bank and Jerusalem – or at least ensuring that this issue assumes a much lower profile on the public agenda – as well as the transfer of territories to PA control and the release of political prisoners, would reduce the motivation for an uprising on the Palestinian street and soften international criticism against Israel for its conduct in the West Bank and toward the PA.¹⁶ Should Israel offer gestures without a direct stipulation of a return gesture from the Palestinian Authority, this would aid in quieting public protest against the PA for cooperation with Israel, which is interpreted as surrender without assurance of a political gain.

Given the political deadlock, it is difficult to assume that Palestinian pursuit of independence will be removed from the international agenda, or that in the absence of a breakthrough in the negotiations, the PA will forego its international initiative. Furthermore, it is possible that even if the regular dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian representatives is resumed, such as the talks that began in January 2012 in Amman, the PA will nonetheless pursue its diplomatic momentum. Therefore, the government of Israel would do well to reexamine the issue of international recognition of a Palestinian state and focus on the negotiating advantages that might be provided by a declared Palestinian state’s need to conduct negotiations to implement concrete sovereignty and become sustainable. By joining the international support for Palestinian independence, especially while updating existing agreements and presenting them as intended to promote realization of the idea, Israel would lessen the international pressure it faces and allow the resumption of negotiations. This policy would also aid Israel in mobilizing international support for its positions on the contours of a permanent agreement and understanding for its reservations about Palestinian demands in this context.

Another interest Israel and the PA have in common is regulating relations between Fatah and Hamas. The political and security implications of the alternative are well known: a division into two Palestinian authorities, with the Hamas-led authority aspiring to

undermine the position of the authority headed by Fatah, through escalation in waves of violent conflict with Israel, among other methods.

As for the PA, it cannot continue for the long term to conduct itself as if it were the only authority among the Palestinians. Its efforts to push Hamas to the sidelines, like Israel's efforts, have thus far failed. This may be mainly because of the political impasse and the lack of political hope that would aid it in curbing the local Islamist wave, which is part of an accelerating regional trend resulting from the frustration of particularistic nationalist aspirations. And yet, progress toward national unity will not be without risks for the PA.

The Palestinian Authority will have to try to prevent Hamas from escalating the conflict with Israel, though its ability to influence Hamas is limited: Hamas' public standing is inferior to Fatah's, and Hamas is still based in a region that is cut off geographically, politically, and militarily from the Palestinian Authority.¹⁷ If another round of conflict takes place between Israel and Hamas, the PA will be forced to choose between supporting Hamas, thereby lending further validity to its status, and opposing it (as it did during the late 2008-early 2009 war between Israel and Hamas). If it refrains from criticizing Hamas, it will perhaps score points among some in Israel, but it will risk public criticism at home. Moreover, adoption of Hamas' political dictates will end the chances to promote a permanent settlement and diminish international support for the PA. On the other hand, pronouncements on a commitment to a settlement not accompanied by progress in the political process will continue to arm Hamas in the battle for public opinion against the PA. Accordingly, the PA should soften its conditions for a return to the talks and thereby spur Israel – or more precisely, make it difficult for Israel to refuse – to return to the negotiating table, even if in the initial stage the agenda is limited to negotiations on resuming the negotiations.

The political and public opposition in Israel to the attempt at institutional coordination between the organizations and their joint intention to hold elections is understandable: Hamas rejects the principle of an agreed-upon permanent settlement, and there is a fear that it will grow stronger in the West Bank as well, with the threatening military aspects this entails. Yet this firm opposition also ignores the chance that integrating Hamas into the official Palestinian system would be a stage on the way to establishment of a functioning, legitimate national

authority. Over time, this authority would not be able to completely deny the need for legitimacy and international aid. Therefore, the possibility that its platform would include a willingness in principle to consider a permanent settlement with Israel should not be ruled out. Over time, and especially if this authority engages in purposeful negotiations with Israel, there would presumably be an erosion of the motivation of the Hamas leadership and activists to continue the violent struggle.

One could claim that unilateralism that brings together Israeli and Palestinian interests is also a possibility. Thus, the PA would continue to pursue international recognition of Palestinian independence, and Israel would reexamine the former convergence plan in the West Bank. If these plans are put into action, a new political-territorial situation will be created in the theater of conflict, which will seemingly exempt the sides from the need to confront difficult and complex problems with ideological, security, and political ramifications. Yet even if the Palestinian Authority declares unilateral independence, it will still need to coordinate with Israel lest it find itself without security and economic support. The socioeconomic tension that would then be created in the West Bank would be liable to ignite violence, which would loosen the PA's security and administrative hold over the area. The violence would also inevitably spill over to Israel. If Israel chooses unilateral withdrawal, it will accelerate its marginalization in the international consensus, since

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withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which is a defined area, is not like withdrawal from the West Bank. Unilateral withdrawal from parts of the West Bank would likely not involve massive evacuation of settlements and would perforce not include a proposal for land swaps. Therefore, the move would be interpreted as abandonment of the path

to an agreed-upon settlement and a step that will eliminate the chance to establish a Palestinian state with reasonable territorial contiguity. Unequivocal unilateralism is thus a problematic option rife with risks for both sides.

Conclusion

In recent years, the rift between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has been limited to the political realm, and even with a political impasse,

the parties have maintained security and economic coordination. This ongoing cooperation can serve as a basis for restoring mutual trust. Later, with changes in the political atmosphere on both sides, it can also be a basis for resuming concrete negotiations. In order to allow matters to develop in this direction, both sides will need to keep channels of communication open, and from among the main bones of contention isolate those points where the parallel lines they pursue may converge.

First and foremost, Israel and the PA will need to expand their current agreements for conflict management and anchor them in official understandings, a kind of admission of the benefit they both reap from relative quiet. So that security stability in the West Bank will not continue to be an argument in favor of the status quo, rather a means of maintaining the relevancy of joint pursuit of fulfilling the idea of partitioning the land, Israel and the PA will need to take steps that show an intention to translate into action declarations on a willingness to promote a settlement. Israeli gestures to the Palestinians should demonstrate incipient changes in the situation. Similarly, it is up to the PA to soften its preconditions for resuming negotiations. Since the PA is expected to continue to mobilize international support for recognition of a Palestinian state, Israel ought to examine the possibility that such recognition would be a basis for future negotiations over borders and security arrangements with Israel. At the same time, since it will be difficult for the PA to pull back from a process of institutional rapprochement with Hamas, Israel should also attempt to examine intra-Palestinian reconciliation as a step that is likely to promote the establishment of a unified Palestinian national authority, which would be able to implement understandings, if and when they are concluded.

Notes

- 1 According to a public opinion poll, more than 80 percent of the respondents supported the PA's UN initiative. See Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) Poll No. 41, September 21, 2011.
- 2 "Palestinians Resigned to Defeat in UN Bid," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 10, 2011.
- 3 *Quartet Statement*, New York, September 23, 2011, www.un.org/news/dh/infocus/middle_east/quartet-23spt2011.htm; Isabel Kershner, "Israel Supports Proposal to Restart Mideast Talks," *New York Times*, October 2, 2011; "Quartet's Efforts Futile without Settlement Halt, Says Official," *Palestine News and Info Agency*, October 26, 2011. On the PA's commitment to the

Quartet to suspend actions in international forums until the end of January 2012 as a gesture to the Quartet, see Barak Ravid, Avi Issacharoff, and Natasha Mozgovaya, "Palestinian Authority Plans Diplomatic Offensive against Israel," *Haaretz*, January 2, 2012.

- 4 "Abbas: All Options Open if Nothing Comes out of Quartet," *Palestinian News and Info Agency*, January 1, 2012; Barak Ravid, Nir Hasson, and Avi Issacharoff, "Erekat Gives Molho Documents with Palestinian Authority Positions on Borders and Security," *Haaretz*, January 4, 2012.
- 5 Ali el-Saleh, "Abbas to Dissolve Palestinian Authority," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 30, 2011.
- 6 The Palestinian Authority proposed to the US administration a temporary suspension of moves in the UN in exchange for resumption of the transfer of tax monies, which were frozen by Israel in response to the PA's acceptance as a member of UNESCO in October 2011. See Barak Ravid, "PA to Israel: We'll Freeze Moves in the UN in Exchange for Transfer of Funds," *Haaretz*, November 17, 2011. This request, which in any case was not accompanied by a change in policy in the international arena, indicated nothing but an intention to survive. On the issue of the PA's economic difficulties, see David Brodet, "The Fragility of the Palestinian Economic Situation," in *Ramifications of the Palestinian Financial Crisis*, Bitterlemons.org., December 5, 2011.
- 7 "While Mr. Abbas Seeks a Virtual State at the UN, Hamas Controls a Real One," *Economist*, September 24, 2011; "Iran Reduces Funding to Hamas," *Middle East Newslite*, October 3, 2011.
- 8 Saleh al-Naami, "Al-Zahar: Inter-Palestinian Reconciliation will not Take Place because Abbas is not Serious about It," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 30, 2011; "Factions Warn of 'Last Chance' ahead of Unity Talks," *Ma'an News Agency*, December 17, 2011; "Palestinian Factions Walk Out of Cairo Meeting," *Ma'an News Agency*, December 21, 2011.
- 9 Saleh al-Naami, "National Unity Gov't Formation depends on Quartet's Reply - Abbas," *a-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 26, 2011.
- 10 Avi Issacharoff, "The Hamas Spring," *Haaretz*, December 30, 2011; "Hamas Denies Reports of Ceasefire," *Ma'an News Agency*, January 1, 2012; "Hamas: Peaceful Resistance not Applicable to Gaza," *Ma'an News Agency*, January 4, 2012.
- 11 Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik, "Hamas Leader Haniyeh: Goal is Destruction of Israel in Stages; Abbas: Hamas Agrees to 1967 Borders," *Palestinian Media Watch*, December 27, 2011.
- 12 Barak Ravid, "Clinton Personally Demands that Netanyahu Release Tax Monies to the Palestinians," *Haaretz*, November 23, 2011; Barak Ravid, "Forum of Eight Releases Funds to Palestinians," *Haaretz*, November 30, 2011.
- 13 Barak Ravid, "In Response to PA's Acceptance by UNESCO, Israel Will Build 2,000 Housing Units in the Settlements," *Haaretz*, November 1, 2011; "Israeli Settlements Condemned by Western Powers," *BBC*, November 2, 2011.

- 14 Nir Hasson, "Government Promotes 1,000 Housing Units in the Territories," *Haaretz*, December 19, 2011. See also "Statement by EU: HR Ashton on Plans to Construct 1000 Housing Units in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem," <http://www.eu-un.europa.eu/home/print.asp?1=1&lg=5>.
- 15 During discussions with the US administration on freezing construction in the West Bank, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed willingness to consider a second temporary freeze in exchange for Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. See "Netanyahu: If the Palestinians Recognize a Jewish State, We'll Agree to an Additional Freeze," *Haaretz*, October 11, 2010. In other words, the PA was asked to meet a condition that would allow Israel to agree to a US demand, though it was clear that this would make it difficult for the PA to back down from the demand for a total freeze for an unlimited period of time.
- 16 Barak Ravid, "Abbas Seeks a Quiet Freeze for Three Months, but Prime Minister Netanyahu Remains Mum," *Haaretz*, October 2, 2011; "PA Expands Security Forces," *Middle East Newsline*, October 3, 2011; Amos Harel and Barak Ravid, "IDF To Recommend that Government Release Prisoners and Transfer Territories to Strengthen Abbas," *Haaretz*, October 24, 2011.
- 17 According to a public opinion poll, PSR Poll No. 42, December 15–17, 2011, if PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh were to run against each other for the presidency, Abbas would receive 55 percent of the vote, while Haniyeh would receive only 37 percent. The survey also showed that among those who intend to vote, 43 percent will vote for Fatah and 29 percent for Hamas. Interestingly, support for Hamas in the West Bank is greater than in the Gaza Strip. Hamas enjoys 35 percent support in the Gaza Strip and 25 percent support in the West Bank. Fatah enjoys 43 percent support in the Gaza Strip and 44 percent in the West Bank.