

The Beijing Palestinian Reconciliation Agreement: An Opportunity not to Be Missed

by Menachem Klein

The Palestinian reconciliation agreement signed in Beijing on 22 July¹ did not attract much attention. It is easy to understand why. Many agreements like it have been signed between Fatah and Hamas since the 1980s and have not been implemented. What is different about this agreement? The difference does not lie in the prospects for reconciliation, which may materialise or ultimately fail like its predecessors, but rather in the contents to which the Hamas movement has agreed. In other words, the novelty is not in the reconciliation but in Hamas's modified positions.

A political agreement

The content of previous reconciliation documents, the Cairo agreement of April 2011 and the Algerian agreement

of October 2022, was remarkably technical. They dealt with election methods for the top institutions of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) as well as the principles of political reform to be conducted in them.

The Beijing Agreement is based on these agreements but, unlike its predecessors, contains political principles. In the past, Fatah raised them explicitly but Hamas did not openly commit to them. These principles include the establishment of an independent Palestine based on UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947, known as the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine for a two-state solution, and UN Security Council Resolution 2334 of 2016, which demanded Israel to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities including in East Jerusalem as, according to the resolution, they constitutes a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive

¹ For the full text see: "Reconciliation: Agreement in China to Include All Factions in the Organisation and Form a Government" [in Arabic], in *Ma'an News*, 22 July 2024, <https://www.maannews.net/news/2121847.html>.

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peace.² Fatah led the PLO to approve the partition plan and include it in its Declaration of Independence of 1988. Until the Beijing agreement, Hamas had refrained from explicitly committing to it. It fundamentally contradicts the Islamic Charter of 1988 but is in line with Hamas's Principles and Policy Document of 2017.³

Notably, the word "peace" does not appear in the Beijing Agreement, but is one of the clauses of Resolution 2334, along with the two-state solution and the 1967 lines.⁴ The acceptance of this resolution by the Security Council was and remains a diplomatic achievement of which Abu Mazen is proud. Now, Hamas accepts it as well.

The impact of the Gaza war

The context for the change in Hamas's attitude is the Gaza war. Hamas seeks to return to a political track, with the political leadership aiming to take back the reins held by the military wing since the failure of the political option in the spring of 2021.⁵ Some may argue

² The Council also stressed that it will not recognise any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations.

³ Hamas, *A Document of General Principles and Policies*, 1 May 2017, <https://palestina-komitee.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/HAMAS-A-Document-of-General-Principles-and-Policies-May-1-2017.pdf>. I analysed this document in my article in *+972 Magazine*. See Menachem Klein, "Hamas' New Charter Reveals a Willingness to Change", in *+972 Magazine*, 10 April 2017, <https://www.972mag.com/?p=126572>.

⁴ UN Security Council, *Resolution 2334 (2016)*, 23 December 2016, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2334\(2016\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2334(2016)).

⁵ On this see Menachem Klein, "Israeli Arrogance Thwarted a Palestinian Political Path. October 7 Revealed the Cost", in *+972 Magazine*,

that this renewed focus on politics was caused by the heavy international – and the implicit Palestinian – criticism of the war crimes committed by Hamas in the 7 October attack, without taking into account Israel's horrible revenge in the forms of mass killings, population transfer and the destruction of Gaza. This explanation cannot be dismissed.

But it is also possible to argue the opposite, based on the public opinion polls by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, the director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah that since 2000 conducts reliable surveys on Palestinian public opinion. In the July 2024 release of the poll, 75 per cent of interviewed Palestinians said to be satisfied with Hamas's performance compared to 24 per cent with Fatah's and 10 per cent with Mahmoud Abbas's.⁶ Although decreased by four percentage points compared to the March 2024 poll,⁷ two thirds of the interviewees said that Hamas's decision to launch the October offensive was correct. The conclusion that the war revived the international attention to the conflict and that it could lead to increased recognition of Palestinian statehood was shared by 82 per cent of interviewed Palestinians.

With the increase in support for Hamas and the decline of Fatah and the PA, Hamas feels confident to adopt

28 November 2023, <https://www.972mag.com/?p=175374>.

⁶ Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), *Public Opinion Poll No. 92 (26 May-1 June 2024)*, 10 July 2024, <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/985>.

⁷ PSR, *Public Opinion Poll No. 91 (5-10 March 2024)*, <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/973>.

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decisions it refrained from making in the past. A similar process had occurred previously in Fatah too. Its public support in the first intifada led the organisation to accept the UN partition resolution, which the Palestinian leadership had previously rejected.

A new set of priorities

The perception that Hamas is a fundamentalist religious organisation without a proper political path is thus a serious mistake in understanding reality. The war has created a new set of priorities, with the main question being who will lead the Gaza Strip when Israel withdraws and through the subsequent process leading up to the election, to which the Palestinian factions have agreed and are committed to. In Beijing, Hamas and Fatah agreed on the formation of a temporary unity government within the framework of the existing PA, with its jurisdiction applying to both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Its tasks will include the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and preparing for the elections. In the background is a previous agreement between Hamas and Fatah regarding the entry of Hamas into the PLO but remaining outside the Palestinian Authority government.

In contrast to the Beijing agreement, top Israeli security officials believe that it is possible to remove Hamas completely. The assassination of Ismail Haniyeh in Teheran is an integral part of this concept. Accordingly, if the PA enters the Gaza Strip, this will be done without Hamas. Netanyahu, however, argues that the PA should not be allowed to govern the Gaza Strip.

The most extreme members of the Israeli government plan to reintroduce settlements into the Strip and expel a large number of its residents to Egypt.

The Beijing agreement, however, shows that it is impossible to separate Hamas from the PA in Ramallah, and that key figures in Hamas are eventually embarking on the political path championed by Fatah and the PLO, albeit in a roundabout way. This is an opportunity to change the current miserable situation that must not be missed.

31 July 2024

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