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Fatah and Hamas: an elusive reconciliation

Article (Published version)

Original citation:

Tartir, Alaa (2012) Fatah and Hamas: an elusive reconciliation, [openDemocracy](#) (09 Apr 2012), Blog Entry.

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Fatah and Hamas: an elusive reconciliation

Fatah and Hamas: an elusive reconciliation

[Alaa Tartir](#) [1] 9 April 2012

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Such joint measures as Fatah and Hamas are agreed upon fall very far short of challenging the occupying powers.

In the life of the Palestinians and over their history, many settlements meant to be temporary in nature, nevertheless became permanent and long term. In the 1948 Nakba and [ethnic cleansing](#) [13], my grandparents and other Palestinians uprooted from the historical Palestine expected that they would be able to return to their lands, houses, farms and hometowns in a week's time. They believed it was just temporary; however, sixty four years later, they remain stuck with the status of permanent refugees. In 1993 when the Palestinian Authority was established, proponents of the mainstream Palestinian polity and the Oslo Accords believed that the Palestinian Authority as a quasi-state body was temporary in nature and that by the year 1999, that body would be transformed into an independent Palestinian state. However, after nineteen years the state seems much further off than in the nineties, and if it has any reality, it is becoming ever more evident that it will be a papier-mâché state that lacks both *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty. This unpleasant transformation of the temporary into permanence has a huge impact on the every day lives of the Palestinians. The very fact that the Israeli military settler-colonial occupation still persists is further proof of this temporary-permanent paradox. My fear and concern is that the West Bank-Gaza Strip divide, or more precisely, the Fatah-Hamas divide will join the above list and transform itself, from being short-term in nature, into a lasting and fatal permanence.

For five years now, we have puzzled over the reasons why these two factions (Fatah and Hamas), both hanging on under conditions of occupation and siege, fail to unite, reconcile and mount a joint struggle against Israeli occupation? Is it really so difficult and complex a division to overcome? In failing to understand why this is the case, do the Palestinian people dramatically fail to grasp the prophetic vision that their 'leadership' claim to have? Is this divide really about having an agenda, strategies, goals and programmes, or it is really about other things that are out of the reach of ordinary citizens with their limited abilities? Unfortunately, with every new day that passes without achieving unity, it becomes more evident that there is a 'divide industry' or 'divide business' that both factions/authorities benefit from on various levels, in different ways, and using diverse tools and means. And it seems, from their perspectives, that there is no rush at all to genuinely end this business of division. Rationally speaking, would anyone liquidate his/her own business while it was bringing in enough profits and he/she is the exclusive owner of that business? Most likely no, unless

the stakeholders revolt. This Fatah-Hamas mutual enterprise will carry on through its various stages and rounds of excuses, obstacles created and more circumstances to be unforeseen, until the moment that the stakeholders (the Palestinian people in this case) speak out and act to change and challenge the existing status quo with its multiple layers of oppression and repression.

Over the last five years, authorities in both the West Bank and Gaza deployed various measures to sustain and subsidise this divide. Getting rid of these measures and this divide is not a straightforward task, however urgent and popular it may be. The West Bank's authority has assumed a *West Bank First* strategy; creating behavioural and life-style changes among the West [Bankers](#) [14], who now enjoy the diplomatic and financial support of the international community with all its inducements to implementing a neo-[liberal](#) [15] and [Weberian governance reform agenda](#) [16]. It is hoped that this will finally suppress all the youth movement's efforts and initiatives calling, among other things, for an immediate [reconciliation](#) [17]. The Gaza Strip's authority has meanwhile managed the Gaza Strip as if, despite the occupation and the siege, it were a third entity or state. This has delayed any genuine efforts to induce reconciliation, instead waiting upon the wave of political Islam in neighbouring countries to bring its positive goods to Gaza. Its leaders have enjoyed the official trips and stronger state-like relations with countries such as Iran and [Qatar](#) [18]; despite the fact that this has led to another internal divide between the Inside-Outside leadership of the Palestinians, identical to the one they suffered under in 1993/4 when Fatah was in charge. The danger of creating additional facts on the ground makes reaching a reconciliation harder and more all-consuming and indeed deviates attention away from the core problem in the Palestinian occupied territory, which is the Israeli military occupation.

As a result, the two authorities/factions, each armed with its authoritarian regimes and securitization [transformations](#) [19], have assumed parallel programmes and goals. The bottom line for both, therefore, is how to make sure that they will not intersect, rather than reaching any kind of compromise solution. Over the last five years both parties have been forced by various actors and on different occasions to meet, talk and sign, but never firmly agree. Or more precisely maybe (since there is no transparency in these talks), never implement or carry out whatever agreements they claim to have made to their respective constituencies. How long can this go on?

It is clear that failure after failure to implement must fuel popular [anger](#) [20] and indeed render both authorities much less legitimate in the eyes of ordinary citizens. Indeed, these Palestinian leaders are anything but representative: no-one really knows who their leaders [are](#). [21] This introduces another element of mistrust between the people and the authorities - a gap which can only continue to widen and require more and more time to be bridged.

However, on top of all of that, Israel and the United States, the two additional beneficiaries from this mutually reinforced division, are also complicit in creating and sustaining it. The United States, through its politicized humanitarian and development aid [leverage](#) [22] and its brokering role, is directly responsible for the [trapped peace process](#) [23]; and together with Israel's form of colonial control, these two powers are able to set the rules of the game. So it seems, neither Fatah nor Hamas are interested in any genuine challenge to the occupying and imperial powers.

The conclusion is inescapable if you take into account the following recent examples of both leaderships' visible keenness on sustaining the status quo. The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank has reacted to hunger strikes by Khader [Adnan](#) [24], Hana [Shalabi](#) a [25] and other freedom fighters imprisoned in Israeli jails, by doing everything in their power to avoid any spread of this form of resistance. The suppression of the youth movement and their closely-monitored activities in both Gaza and the West Bank is another example. The suppression of the [Land Day](#) [26] activities and events and the marches to Al-Quds (Jerusalem) especially in [Gaza](#) [27] but also in the West [Bank: t](#) [28] the arrest of [journalists](#) [29] and activists on the grounds of their Facebook messages, and the creation of a Palestinian FBI (for Facebook [Investigation](#) [30]) are all proof of this authoritarian tendency. The electricity and fuel crisis in Gaza represents another surly illustration of this. The two prime ministers Fayyad and Haniyeh have finally [agreed](#) [31] how to solve the problem of supplying Gaza with electricity and fuel. Basically, Haniyeh will pay Fayyad, so that Gaza will have fuel and electricity while Fayyad narrows the financial deficit in his government budget and finally succeeds in forcing the Hamas government to pay up from what West Bank officials describe as their 'savings'. This long-delayed win-win situation for the prime ministers and their political constituencies hardly

indicates an urgent commitment to the Palestinian cause and struggle. Their surreal brinkmanship masks the root cause for the electricity and fuel crisis in Gaza alongside the many other injustices and forms of oppression, which are the Israeli siege and occupation and the absence of Palestinian unity. This is a dangerous obfuscation.

At the end of the day the message is short and clear: until the Palestinians themselves, and only themselves, revolt against the Fatah-Hamas enterprise, the status quo will remain dominant and hence the colonial occupation will continue with its ground-plan to steal more lands, build new settlements and make the establishment of a Palestinian future state an unattainable dream.

Country or region: Palestine

Israel

Topics: Civil society

Conflict

Democracy and government

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 About the author

Alaa Tartir is a Palestinian PhD candidate in Development Studies and Global Governance at the London School of Economics, researching the role of good governance in state formation in Palestine. His research areas include international aid and development, non-governmental organizations, public policies, and politics. He is also a research fellow at the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute-MAS.



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