

March 2007 Addendum to
Myth of a “Moderate” Fatah

Arlene Kushner

The Center for Near East Policy Research

New Developments

The Fatah-Hamas Accord at Mecca

On February 8, 2007, Fatah and Hamas leaders, meeting in Mecca under the sponsorship of Saudi Arabia, reached agreement on the formation of a PA unity government.

The Accord they produced, roughly based upon the Prisoners Document, was couched in general terms and did not bridge all gaps in the positions between Fatah and Hamas. What it did was establish certain broad principles and obligate the two sides to attempt to create a stable regime.

While a unity government has not yet been established as this is written – and continuing Fatah-Hamas friction casts some doubt on the likelihood that it will be – the Accord must be examined for what it reveals about the intentions and commitments of Fatah and PA president Mahmoud Abbas.

Abbas has stated that the agreement was concerned only with an internal Palestinian matter – prevention of a Palestinian civil war – and was not intended to address relations with Israel. In the words of Lt. Col. (res.) Jonathan D. Halevi,¹ the Accord is a “tactical political measure calculated to create a false impression regarding Hamas' political flexibility in order to whitewash the organization into being accepted as a legitimate player in the international arena...”

Fatah has now moved closer to the Hamas position.

Members of Fatah concede that they made most of the compromises in reaching the Accord; according to one Hamas leader, "Fatah made 90 percent of the concessions, while Hamas made only 10%."

Major points Abbas agreed to in Mecca, and issues he was willing to skirt:²

- ◆ Hamas will still head the government.
- ◆ Hamas will control the Ministry of the Interior.
- ◆ Fatah will relinquish control of the significant Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Finance. Independents in these positions will work under the Hamas.
- ◆ Hamas's paramilitary Executive Force of 4,000 will be incorporated into the PA security forces instead of being disbanded.
- ◆ Abbas accepts the Hamas stance that it "respects" rather than "abides by" previous agreements between the PLO and Israel.
- ◆ To avoid alienating Hamas, Israel was not mentioned in the Accords or in any public statements by Fatah following the announcement regarding the Accords.
- ◆ There is no mention in the Accords of a peace process or for the need to renounce violence. Nor did Abbas allude to these issues in his statements.

Since his return from Mecca, Abbas has been promoting the position that he can negotiate with Israel as the head of the PLO, rather than as president of the PA.³ The implication, on first blush, appears to be one of trying to achieve negotiations by circumventing the unity government, which will not have recognized Israel nor agreed to abide by previous agreements.

However, as HaLevi⁴ explains:

Hamas stipulated as a condition for participating in a unity government that there was to be organizational and ideological reform in the PLO, paving the way for the absorption of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Abbas has agreed to this.

Hamas's goal is to take control of the movement and its financial institutions, and then ultimately to effect ideological reform that will expunge recognition of Israel.

Information Newly Acquired

Fatah Links to Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah

Pinchas Inbari, a veteran Palestinian affairs correspondent who has authored several books on the Palestinians, has now written a Brief⁵ for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs that reveals little known information about Fatah.

Among Inbari's revelations:

It is an error to think that Fatah is secular and thus moderate, compared to Hamas which is religious and radical. Fatah, in fact, has strong Muslim features. It speaks of a religious duty to liberate Jerusalem and uses the religious term *jihad*. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the military wing of Fatah, makes announcements "heavily laced with Koranic verses identical to those used by Hizbullah." Arafat's deputy, Abu Jihad, was – as his name, father of Jihad, suggests – the primary promoter of Islam within Fatah.

The Shiite terrorist group Islamic Jihad has its roots in Fatah.

At the time of the Shiite Khomeini revolution in Iran, in 1979, the Sunni Fatah was its primary promoter in the Arab world. Even after the relationship broke down because of Sunni-Shiite tensions, the Abu Jihad wing of Fatah maintained a connection with the Khomeini revolution.

When Israel destroyed the Fatah (PLO) infrastructure in Lebanon in 1982, Abu Jihad supporters in Fatah helped Iran establish Hizbullah in its place.

Anti-Iranian elements in Fatah objected to this, but were ultimately defeated by the Abu Jihad wing.

Islamic Jihad first appeared on the scene in 1990, with an attack on Beit Hadassah in Hebron. When members of the cell were captured they revealed that they had been sent by Abu Jihad, whose ultimate goal in establishing Islamic Jihad was to Islamize Fatah.

Islamic Jihad moved away from Fatah, but re-established a tight connection during the second Intifada, which began in 2000. It was at this time that Arafat established Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, which has Islamic trappings; their commander was close to Iran and to Hizbullah. Both operational cooperation and shared (Iranian) sources of funding brought Al-Aqsa Brigade and Islamic Jihad close. This was seen most significantly with the joint strategy of the Karine-A weapons ship.

¹ HaLevi, a senior researcher on radical Islam for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, analyzed the Mecca Accords in a February 2007 Brief, Vol. 6, No. 20.

² This from the analysis of the Mecca Accord by Khaled Abu Toameh, *The Jerusalem Post*, February 11, 2007.

³ He is technically correct; the PLO is the exclusive representative of the Palestinian people, while the Palestinian Authority is a temporary administrative entity limited to a specific geographic area.

⁴ Op. cit.

⁵ March 2007. Vol. 6. No. 21.