

The Fatah-Hamas Reconciliation: Threatening Peace Prospects

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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, distinguished members of the committee, it is an honor to appear before you this morning to discuss the potential impact of a Fatah-Hamas reconciliation on prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

In the eyes of many, reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas is a prerequisite for advancing peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The idea is that Palestinians cannot negotiate with Israel in any serious way when divided between the West Bank under the rule of the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Gaza Strip under the rule of Hamas. To be sure, PA officials in the West Bank can make neither demands nor concessions when it comes to the Gaza Strip, which they do not control. But the same cannot be said for the West Bank, where the PA is firmly in control. There, in the West Bank, there is much that could be done that would improve the daily lives of Palestinians and Israelis both. But I will leave that line of reasoning to my colleague David Makovsky, with whom I am honored to appear before you today.

The other flaw behind the reasoning that sees Fatah-Hamas reconciliation as some kind of panacea is that Hamas has not changed. It remains committed to violence aimed at destroying Israel; refuses to acknowledge Israel's right to exist; and rejects the idea of a two-state solution. Indeed, Hamas's terms for reconciliation include a cessation of PA security cooperation with Israel, as well as demands that Hamas get control of key ministries like the Ministry of Interior (which oversees security services) and that no changes are made to Hamas's security services in the Gaza Strip.¹ This, of course, would be the equivalent of inviting the fox into the henhouse. Absent reform and concessions on the part of Hamas, reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas would be the death knell of the peace process.

More recently, Hamas revived talk about the possibility it might seek to join the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and assume a leadership position in the organization alongside Fatah. In Hamas's eyes, this would enable the group to follow in the footsteps of fellow Muslim Brotherhood Islamist parties that have come to power over the course of the Arab Awakening. But even here, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal made clear that joining the PLO would not mark a shift in Hamas's ideological or

¹ "Hamas Sets New Terms for Reconciliation with Fatah," Reuters, February 23, 2012, www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/23/us-palestinians-unity-idUSTRE81M0TR20120223.

political positions. Hamas insisted on "liberation first, then a state," Mashal explained, because a state based on "compromise or settlement is not a real state." If that were not clear enough, he added that "Hamas will always be with the resistance. Resistance is not a hotel that we can check into and out of." Indeed, it is at the core of Hamas's identity as a militant Islamist group committed to jihad. Responding to critics of Hamas's decision to agree to a ceasefire with Israel after the November 2012 conflict, Mashal was equally blunt: "To those who view the cease-fire with suspicion, we will be committed to the path of resistance until we liberate Palestine. But escalation and calm, this is a management decision."² In other words, nobody should mistake Hamas's tactical flexibility for strategic change.

To be sure, on the other side of the Fatah-Hamas divide, Fatah remains notoriously corrupt, continues to tolerate and engage in anti-Israel incitement and propaganda, and appears more interested in pursuing international recognition through acts of unilateralism than in pursuing substantive talks with Israel. And yet, continued funding for the PA remains smart policy in the best interests of U.S foreign policy objectives, not to mention Palestinian and Israeli interests.

Hamas Is the Problem

Hamas's continued terrorist activity targeting Israel from the Gaza Strip was underscored most recently by the November 2012 conflict, which was initiated by Hamas provocations such as firing an antitank missile at an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) jeep on the Israeli side of the border; filling a border tunnel with explosives to capture an Israeli soldier; and placing an explosive at the border fence.

For its part, Israel responded as severely as it did to these Hamas provocations because it could not tolerate a situation in which Hamas and other terrorist groups in Gaza continued to stockpile long-range rockets -- including Iranian- and Chinese-made Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 missiles -- and other strategic weapons that could threaten large swaths of the Israeli population at once. These weapons are smuggled into Gaza via ratlines that run the length of Egypt, north to south and east to west. Iran ships weapons to Sudan and, as the recent Israeli attack on a weapons factory in Khartoum revealed, manufactures weapons there as well. These are then trucked north through Egypt, across the Sinai, and into Gaza -- a distance of over 1,500 kilometers. Other weapons, including small arms and man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADs, or shoulder-fired missiles), have been flowing east out of Libya, across northern Egypt, and into Gaza.

Not only had Hamas and other groups amassed arsenals of some 10,000 rockets, Hamas also built weapons labs where it was producing its own long-range rockets (albeit with much smaller payloads) and developing a domestic capability to produce unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Recently, Hamas made significant improvements that increased the range, accuracy, and payloads of its domestically manufactured rockets. Over the course of the November 2012 conflict, Israel destroyed many of these weapons systems, as well as launchpads, production labs, and command-and-control facilities. And Hamas fired off around a thousand of its rockets, further depleting its arsenal. Today, Hamas is working overtime to try to replace these weapons.

² Anne Barnard, "Hamas Chief Revives Talk of Reuniting with PLO," *New York Times*, November 28, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/29/world/middleeast/leader-of-hamas-calls-for-palestinian-unity.html?_r=0.

Meanwhile, even as it pressed ahead with plans to accumulate as many rockets and other weapons as possible in the Gaza Strip, Hamas has worked hard over the past couple of years to rebuild its West Bank networks.

In 2011, Israeli security forces arrested dozens of Hamas operatives spread throughout a network of some thirteen militant cells located in the southern West Bank and the Jerusalem area.³ The network carried out one attack, setting off a small improvised explosive device near the International Convention Center in downtown Jerusalem on March 23, killing a British citizen and wounding forty-seven Israelis.⁴ In another case, the network successfully infiltrated an intended suicide bomber into Jerusalem from Hebron, but authorities thwarted the plot and arrested the would-be bomber on August 22.

Members of the network included more than twenty criminals recruited by jailed Hamas operatives in Israel's Ketziot Prison. Most of them were near the end of their terms at the time of recruitment and were soon released, whereupon they focused their efforts on recruiting more members and plotting kidnapping operations aimed at securing the release of Hamas leaders in Israeli prisons.⁵ Hamas leaders from Gaza helped direct the operations of these new West Bank cells and sought to provide weapons by smuggling them through Sinai and the Negev desert into the southern West Bank.

Among the plots foiled by the Israeli arrests were shootings, kidnappings targeting Israelis near Hebron or the Gush Etzion bloc in the West Bank, and a Jerusalem suicide bombing planned for August 21.⁶ News of the arrests came as a surprise to many given the relative quiet the West Bank has enjoyed recently, which is largely a result of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation targeting Hamas activities there. Yet over the past six months, Israeli security officials have recorded a 25 percent increase in the number of threat warnings regarding potential Hamas attacks in the West Bank, especially in the Hebron, Nablus, and Ramallah areas.

Hamas activity in the West Bank continues. At the end of January, the IDF and Israel Security Agency (ISA, or Shin Bet) arrested twenty known Hamas members in Hebron (West Bank). They are known as Hamas members because they had served prison sentences in Israel previously for terrorist activity. They were planning on carrying out kidnapping plots and had more than ten guns of various types. The investigation revealed that the terror cell maintained contact with high-ranking Hamas officials to receive assistance, directions, and funding. The cell's primary contact was Husam Badran, a former prisoner who was part of the exchange for captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Badran was released from prison in October 2011 and exiled to Qatar. The terrorist cell has been indicted on charges of weapons possession, contacting a hostile organization, and conspiracy to kidnap an IDF soldier.⁷ The IDF also noted that the "terrorists' primary goal was to execute a kidnapping attack in order to bargain for the release of prisoners."⁸

³ Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 12, 2011, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_11_199_2.pdf, 2.

⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵ Ibid., 2-5.

⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷ "Hamas Terror Infrastructure Uncovered," Israel Defense Forces, January 31, 2013, <http://www.idf.il/1283-18192-en/Dover.aspx>.

⁸ "IDF & ISA Uncover Hamas Terrorist Assets in Hebron," Israel Defense Forces blog, January 31, 2013, <http://www.idfblog.com/2013/01/31/idf-isa-uncover-hamas-terrorist-assets-in-hebron/>.

In December, it was reported that Hamas leader Khaled Mashal had instructed Hamas cells in the West Bank to prepare for an armed takeover of the territory.⁹ Earlier that month, Hamas had been allowed to hold its first rally in five years in the West Bank.¹⁰ In October 2012, the Shin Bet arrested thirty members of Hamas near Ramallah.¹¹ On October 27, 2012, Hamas MP Mahmud al-Ramahi was arrested at a military roadblock in the West Bank.¹² In September, a secret Hamas prison was reportedly found in the West Bank, although Hamas denied its existence.¹³

A September 2011 report produced by the Shin Bet indicated "Hamas intensive efforts to restore the organization's military infrastructures" in the West Bank.¹⁴ The report listed three sources contributing to these efforts: Hamas headquarters abroad, imprisoned Hamas activists, and Gaza Strip-based Hamas members who attempt to transfer weapons to the West Bank.

Hamas Beyond the West Bank and Gaza

Historically, Hamas has limited its operational focus to Israel, with almost all of its attacks occurring within the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel proper. Although many non-Israelis have been killed in such attacks, most of them were unintended victims of inherently indiscriminate terrorist tactics. In 2011, however, Hamas expanded its area of operations. Information released by Israeli and American authorities suggests that the group has now extended its logistical efforts and even certain planning and operational activities as far afield as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria, Egypt, and China.¹⁵

Most startling was the news regarding Muhammad Hisham Muhammad Ismail Abu Ghazala (aka Mansur/Khadim al-Hussein), a Hamas explosives expert targeted by both Washington and Baghdad for his ties to al-Qaeda, Iran, former Saddam regime elements, networks responsible for proliferating improvised explosive devices in northern Iraq, and various terrorist organizations throughout the country. The United States recently listed him as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224, which targets those who carry out or support terrorism. According to the State Department press release announcing the designation, he has worked with rockets and unmanned aerial vehicles and disseminated remote detonation designs to former regime elements and other terrorists in Iraq. The department also highlighted his links with Tehran -- "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism" -- and al-Qaeda.¹⁶

⁹ "Hamas Preparing for West Bank Takeover," *Jerusalem Post*, December 23, 2012, <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=297014>.

¹⁰ "After 5-Year Ban, Hamas Holds Rally in West Bank," *Haaretz*, December 13, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/after-5-year-ban-hamas-holds-rally-in-west-bank-1.484743>.

¹¹ "Israel Arrests West Bank Hamas Militants," Associated Press, October 29, 2012, <http://www.breitbart.com/Big-Peace/2012/10/29/Israel-arrests-West-Bank-Hamas-militants>.

¹² "Israel Arrests Senior Hamas MP in West Bank," Agence France-Presse, October 27, 2012, <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/10/27/israel-arrests-senior-hamas-mp-in-west-bank/>.

¹³ Khaled Abu Toameh, "PA Says It Discovered Secret Hamas Jail by Nablus," *Jerusalem Post*, September 23, 2012, <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=285978>.

¹⁴ Israel Security Agency, "Exposure of Judea and Samaria-Based Hamas Military Terror Infrastructures; Prevention of Suicide Bombing in Jerusalem," September 2011, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/reports/shotef070911-en.pdf>; Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 12, 2011, 3.

¹⁵ Israel Security Agency, "Exposure of Judea and Samaria-Based Hamas Military Terror Infrastructures; Prevention of Suicide Bombing in Jerusalem," September 2011, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/reports/shotef070911-en.pdf>.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Terrorist Designation of Hamas Operative Muhammad Hisham Muhammad Isma'il Abu Ghazala," September 22, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/09/173352.htm>.

For its part, Baghdad had offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to his capture. According to Iraqi national security advisor Muwaffaq Rubaie, Abu Ghazala is among the insurgency's top supporters, which is why he appears thirty-third on the Iraqi government's "41 Most Wanted List." The description of his activities provided in that list is nearly identical to that of the State Department.

Perhaps most surprising, nothing in the U.S. designation suggested that Abu Ghazala broke with Hamas to join the Iraqi insurgency or partner with elements tied to al-Qaeda. To the contrary, the press release emphasized -- in the present tense -- that he "plays an integral role in Hamas." His terrorist activities have apparently caught the attention of other U.S. agencies as well, with the State Department designation serving to "highlight the threat posed by Abu Ghazala while simultaneously assisting and complementing the law enforcement actions of other U.S. agencies."¹⁷

Hamas has also reportedly held operational meetings in Saudi Arabia. Israeli authorities report that in 2011 Hamas members met with new recruits from the Hebron area in Saudi Arabia, giving them operational instructions passed down from the group's military-wing leaders from Gaza. One of the participants, Mamoun Qafisha, was described as "a Hamas military operative who handles recruits in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] from his residence in Saudi Arabia."¹⁸

In the past, Hamas operatives have held meetings in the kingdom during the Hajj pilgrimage, and the group's finance committee has long been known to operate out of Jeddah.¹⁹ Yet the news of Hamas military operatives establishing themselves there and holding terrorist meetings in their Saudi homes was new. One of Qafisha's recruits -- Hussein Qawasmeh, the chief explosives "engineer" of the Israeli-targeted Hamas network discussed earlier -- reportedly built the bomb used in the March 23 Jerusalem attack, and another such device was found at his home in Hebron.²⁰ Similarly, Ahmed Madhoun, one of the Hebron cell's leaders, was recruited at another meeting in Saudi Arabia by Hamas activists from Gaza. Madhoun was reportedly given \$10,000 to recruit and arm a new Hamas cell in Hebron whose primary mission was to kidnap an Israeli soldier.²¹

According to Israeli officials, Hamas weapons procurement operations have over the past few years increasingly led the group's operatives around the world. In February 2011, Israeli agents nabbed Dirar Abu Sisi, a Hamas rocket engineer from Gaza who had been operating in the Ukraine.²² And in July, they arrested Ayman al-Adam, a Jordanian courier of Palestinian descent whose family hailed from the Hebron area. Through him, Hamas leaders in Syria delivered money and instructions on how to assemble bombs and execute kidnappings to members of the Hebron cell. During questioning, al-

¹⁷ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Terrorist Designation of Hamas Operative Muhammad Hisham Muhammad Isma'il Abu Ghazala," September 22, 2011.

¹⁸ Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 12, 2011, http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_11_199_2.pdf, 5.

¹⁹ Matthew Levitt, "A Hamas Headquarters in Saudi Arabia?" PolicyWatch #521 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, September 28, 2005), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-hamas-headquarters-in-saudi-arabia>; Anna Robinowitz, "Terror at the Hajj," PolicyWatch #426 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, March 3, 2004), <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/terror-at-the-hajj>.

²⁰ Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 12, 2011, 5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²² "Palestinian Engineer Accused of Missile Murder Plot," *Guardian*, April 4, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/04/palestinian-accused-missile-plot>.

Adam stated that his Hamas handler in Syria sent him on missions not only to Hebron but also to Turkey and China.²³

In addition, Israeli security officials assert that the scale and scope of Hamas political and operational activity in Turkey -- long a comfortable place for the group -- have increased significantly over the past two years. What is not clear is the extent to which Turkish authorities are aware of the operational efforts. Over the past few years, Hamas operatives in Syria have moved some of their activities to Turkey, where they enjoy greater operational freedom under the Erdogan government. According to the Shin Bet, Hamas operatives in the West Bank received funding, guidance, and training from Hamas headquarters personnel not only in Syria but also in Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, at least one of the Hebron-area operatives arrested since May was also "involved in operations carried out on behalf of the Hamas headquarters in Syria in other countries, including China and Turkey."²⁴ According to the ISA (Shin Bet), its investigation revealed that Hamas activities in China centered on money laundering and weapons procurement, while efforts in Turkey focused on recruiting new operatives.²⁵

The group has also become more active in Egypt. With the Mubarak regime gone, the transitional government weak, the Muslim Brotherhood ascendant, and Syria's Assad regime increasingly isolated, it was no surprise that many Hamas leaders and operatives departed Syria for Egypt and elsewhere. With black market arms flowing east from Libyan depots, and with the Sinai largely ungoverned and underpatrolled, Egypt has also become a hub for weapons procurement. In some cases, like the August 2011 attack near Eilat, Hamas operations included Egyptian nationals as well as other foreign fighters.

Poor Prospects for Calm in the Wake of Operation Pillar Defense

The ceasefire Egypt brokered with American help will last for a period of time. But without significant diplomatic follow-up, it will likely last only as long as it takes for Hamas to rearm. The factors that led Hamas to initiate the violence remain unchanged. For that matter, the factors that drove Israel to respond as it did to the Hamas attacks also remain in play. And while Egypt, which emerges from the conflict with renewed regional standing and "street cred," has every interest in seeing the agreement it mediated stand, it is not clear it is either able or willing to do what is necessary to stem the torrent of weapons flowing across its territory into Gaza.

Hamas initiated the November 2012 round of hostilities against Israel at that particular moment not at Iran's behest, but because it felt emboldened by the rise of Islamist allies in the region, because it had accumulated a sufficiently large stockpile of rockets from Iran, and because some of the most hardline militant leaders of the group's Qassam Brigades won spots on the Hamas Shura Council in Gaza and now dominate both the group's military and political elements in Gaza.

²³ "Exposure of Judea and Samaria-Based Hamas Military Terror Infrastructures; Prevention of Suicide Bombing in Jerusalem," Israel Security Agency, September 2011, <http://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollectionImages/english/TerrorInfo/reports/shotef070911-en.pdf>.

²⁴ Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 12, 2011, 2.

²⁵ Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 12, 2011, 5; Yaakov Katz, "Shin Bet: Hamas Operating in Turkey, China," *Jerusalem Post*, September 8, 2011.

Ever since it assumed control of the Gaza Strip by force of arms, Hamas has faced an acute ideological crisis: it could either engage in acts of violence ("resistance") targeting Israel, or it could effectively govern the Gaza Strip -- but not both. The result is a tension within Hamas, the "Islamic Resistance Movement," which has been forced to suspend the resistance for which it is named and by which it defines itself. And while Hamas is not a monolithic movement, the one constant among its various currents is its self-identification as a resistance movement. Meanwhile, Hamas has been increasingly challenged from the right by traditional allies like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), and by still more radical Salafist-jihadist groups like al-Tawhid wal-Jihad and the Mujahideen Shura Council Beit al-Maqdas. The latter are composed of several smaller Salafist-jihadist factions, which bound together for the express purpose of being better positioned to confront Hamas's calls for restraint and pursue a strictly militant agenda of targeting Israel.

As it contended with this challenge, Hamas underwent a significant change of its own. In April 2012, Hamas hardliners dominated in secret elections for the Hamas Shura Council and Political Bureau in Gaza. For example, the former head of the Damascus-based military committee, Imad al-Alami, was elected deputy chief of the Gaza Political Bureau. Relative moderates were defeated, while Qassam Brigades leaders loyal to military leader Mohammad Deif won or retained seats on the Political Bureau, including the late Ahmed Jabari, his deputy and successor Marwan Issa, and others. Under this new, more militant political leadership, Hamas leaders gave greater weight to their responsibility to engage in acts of "resistance" against Israel over their responsibility to effectively govern the Gaza Strip. And they felt emboldened by the show of regional support after the Arab Awakening, from the fact that their fellow Muslim Brothers were now in power in Cairo, to the state visits to Gaza of the Turkish president and the Qatari emir.

In the wake of the ceasefire, Hamas will still have to balance governance with resistance and contend with challenges to its credentials from small groups unencumbered by the responsibilities of governing and keen to continue attacking Israel. Meanwhile, Hamas hardliners, for whom the responsibilities of governance cannot trump resistance, remain in power.

Clearly, then, the ceasefire will only last if Egypt takes its responsibility to patrol its sovereign territory seriously and prevents Hamas and other militant groups in Gaza from rearming. Hamas takes a long view of its conflict with Israel, and nothing indicates it is about to moderate its views. Its intent to confront Israel militarily remains unchanged, and it continues to oppose progress toward a two-state solution. So long as a negotiated two-state solution remains Fatah's goal, Hamas will continue to resist serious reconciliation talks. Absent any real shift in Hamas's ideology and intent, the only true factor determining how much of a threat Hamas continues to pose is the question of its capabilities. The ceasefire will last as long as it takes Hamas to rearm, and likely not much longer than that. As one Israeli official put it to me a few weeks before the November 2012 conflict, "We don't know when Hamas will attack, but we fully expect at some point they will. They are not collecting all those rockets as paperweights."

Reconciliation on Whose Terms?

So long as the PA remains committed to a two-state solution, continues to engage in security cooperation with Israel, and rejects Hamas demands that it join "the resistance," Washington should continue funding the PA government in Ramallah. But such funding need not be provided unconditionally. For example, the U.S. Congress could establish benchmarks for performance and require the State Department to provide periodic reports on the PA's activities -- much as Congress once required reports on PLO compliance with the PLO Commitments Compliance Act (PLOCCA). This

could measure not only security cooperation but also corruption, mismanagement, application of the rule of law, and incitement.

But the fact remains that while inconsistent, the PA continues to engage in critical security activities that contribute to the safety of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians. Consider a few examples, as cited by the State Department:²⁶

- In January, Palestinian security forces (PASF) arrested fifteen Hamas operatives in overnight raids in the West Bank districts of Nablus and Jenin; two senior Hamas officials were separately detained by the PA in Haloul and in Nablus. Also in January, PA security forces conducted sweeps throughout the West Bank, detaining dozens of members of the Hizb al-Tahrir Salafist-Islamist group.
- In February, the PA arrested eleven Hamas operatives in overnight operations in Palestinian villages near the West Bank city of Hebron.
- In March, PA security forces arrested seven Hamas operatives in an overnight sweep in the West Bank cities of Jenin, Nablus, and Hebron.
- In May and June, the PA arrested more than eighty Hamas operatives across the West Bank and tried seven for security-related offenses.
- In July, the PASF arrested twenty-two Hamas members near Nablus.
- In August, PA security personnel detained the son of a prominent Hamas activist on suspicion of being involved in armed activities; several dozen other Hamas operatives were detained by the PA in the Nablus-area villages of Aqraba and Awarta, and in the West Bank cities of Tulkarem, Ramallah, and Hebron.
- In September, the PASF detained twenty Hamas operatives in the West Bank cities of Salfit, Hebron, and Nablus over a forty-eight-hour period, and issued court summons to several hundred others.
- In December, the PASF arrested twenty-six members of Hamas and five members of PIJ. Hamas accused the PASF of an "escalating arrest campaign of its supporters" and organized a youth rally in Hebron to protest the continued arrests.

There remains plenty of room for improvement. For example, the State Department reported that on April 24, 2011, a member of the PASF opened fire on Israeli worshippers visiting Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, killing one and injuring six others. The Israeli government characterized the attack as a terrorist incident, while the PA described it as a violation of the PASF rules of engagement.²⁷

²⁶ U.S. State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2011*, July 2012, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/195768.pdf>.

²⁷ Ibid.

Conclusion

While there is much room for improvement on the part of the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority, so long as it remains committed to a two-state solution at the strategic level and to security cooperation with Israel at the tactical level, it remains the best partner both Israel and the United States have within the Palestinian camp.

To its credit, the State Department has led a concerted effort over the past couple of years to press foreign governments to crack down on Hamas fundraising and other activity within their borders. Recent events underscore the need to redouble these efforts, however, focused on disrupting Hamas's logistical, financial, and operational plans abroad.

Meanwhile, significant diplomatic pressure (and perhaps some tactical support or training) must be applied to Egypt to prevent Hamas from rearming after the last conflict with Israeli in November.

And while efforts to pursue final-status negotiations are well intentioned, they come at a time when the parties are simply not capable of seriously negotiating end-of-conflict issues. But there is still plenty of substantive, meaningful forward movement to be pursued. And the good news is that to do so does not require pressing for a reconciliation that would amount to inviting the fox that is Hamas into the henhouse that is the PA (or the PLO). Moving forward, Secretary Kerry and his colleagues in the new Obama cabinet should focus their immediate attention on the West Bank, where confidence-building measures, practical measures to improve daily living conditions, and negotiations over issues like border swaps along the Green Line could tangibly move the parties closer to peace despite the fact that the Gaza Strip remains under the control of a designated terrorist group as committed to violence today as it ever was.