

Hamas, Fatah ink deal on Palestinian reconciliation

On the same page: Fatah's Azam al-Ahmad, right, and Saleh al-Aruri of Hamas after signing the deal in Cairo. AFP

Rival Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah signed an agreement on Thursday on ending a decade-long split following talks mediated by Egypt in Cairo, with President Mahmud Abbas calling it a "final" accord.

Under the agreement, the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority is to resume full control of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip by December 1, according to a statement from Egypt's intelligence agency, which oversaw the talks.

Mr. Abbas welcomed the deal and said he considered it a "final agreement to end the division" — though many details remain to be resolved and previous reconciliation attempts have failed. It was signed in Cairo by new Hamas deputy leader Salah al-Aruri and Azzam al-Ahmad, the head of the Fatah delegation for the talks.

Negotiations are now expected to be held on forming a unity government, with the various Palestinian political movements invited to another meeting in Cairo on November 21.

Abbas's first visit

An official from Mr. Abbas's Fatah movement said the Palestinian President was planning to soon travel to the Gaza Strip as part of the unity bid in what would be his first visit in a decade.

Sanctions taken by Mr. Abbas against Gaza will also soon be lifted, the Fatah official said.

The deal includes 3,000 members of the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority's police force redeploying to Gaza, a member of the negotiating team said on condition of anonymity.

The figure is, however, a fraction of the more than 20,000 police officers employed separately by Hamas.

Another party to the negotiations, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the agreement would see Palestinian Authority forces take control of the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

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