

## A hand from Hamas — on Palestinian reconciliation

Hamas's decision to [dissolve the Gaza administrative committee](#) and hold talks with Fatah is the strongest signal yet from the Islamist group that it is ready to cooperate in finding common ground with its political rival. Hamas, which won the 2006 elections in the Palestinian territories, fought a war with Fatah in 2007 for the control of Gaza after its West Bank government was dissolved by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. Ever since, Mr. Abbas's Fatah ruled those parts of the West Bank that are not under Israeli control, while Hamas dominated Gaza. However, in recent months [Hamas has shown interest in a rapprochement](#) as the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, blockaded by Israel and Egypt, worsens. In May it adopted a new political charter, softening its stand on Israel and accepting, for the first time, the idea of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 border. In the latest move, Hamas, after holding talks with Egyptian officials, has said it would allow the reconciliation government based in Ramallah to run Gaza and hold elections in the territories. Expectedly, Fatah has welcomed the statement. Over the past decade, while Israel has steadily tightened its occupation of the West Bank, the Palestinian leadership has been unable to either mount an effective resistance or launch a convincing peace bid, mainly because of the divisions within. Both Fatah and Hamas held talks several times, but in vain, about solving differences and forming a unity government.

Now that both have come forward and demonstrated a willingness to compromise, the possibility of a rapprochement is higher. But this does not mean the future will be smooth for Palestinians; sticky issues remain. Even if both sides bury the hatchet and form a national unity government, Hamas's role in such an arrangement would continue to be contentious. Hamas is seen as a terrorist organisation by several international actors, including the United States, Israel and the European Union. This is one reason why the elected government of Hamas was not allowed to rule a decade ago. Despite these challenges, Hamas's moderation is real and gradual. It first set aside a charter, which Israel and its allies saw as an impediment to peace, and it is now proposing intra-Palestinian reconciliation. This moderation offers an opportunity not just for Fatah but for other stakeholders as well. If Fatah and Hamas form a national government and ease the many restrictions currently in place on Gaza, it would be a huge relief for the territory's 1.8 million people. A united bloc would also enhance the bargaining power of the Palestinians *vis-à-vis* Israel. The international community should also realise the potential of these changes and respond positively by putting pressure on Israel to come forward for a new round of the peace process.

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