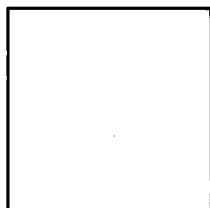

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 7, 2012 11:04 AM
To: H
Subject: FW: CNN Global Public Square: The Doha Palestinian unity agreement: Now the hard part

This is a solid analysis of the Doha deal.

From: Robert Danin [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, February 07, 2012 10:45 AM
To: Undisclosed recipients
Subject: CNN Global Public Square: The Doha Palestinian unity agreement: Now the hard part

B6



The Doha Palestinian Unity Agreement: Now the hard part

Editor's Note: Robert M. Danin is Eni Enrico Mattei Senior Fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is a former Director for the Levant and Israeli-Palestinian Affairs at the National Security Council and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs. He writes the blog Middle East Matters at CFR.org.

By Robert M. Danin – Special to CNN

February 7, 2012

Monday's Fatah-Hamas unity agreement announced in Doha marks the latest in a series of unimplemented accords between the two Palestinian adversaries. The two sides announced - again - their intention to unify their efforts and form an independent caretaker government to shepherd the Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza to new elections.

In an innovation that apparently violates the Palestinian Basic Law, the two sides agreed that Mahmoud Abbas would serve as both president and prime minister of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Recall, the PA's prime

minister position was established in 2003 and Abbas was appointed to that post to reduce the absolute powers of the presidency, then in Yassir Arafat's hands. Ironically, it is now Abbas as president who is seeking to claim back what he once tried to take away.

Monday's announcement is more of a statement of intent than it is a full-fledged accord. When it comes to Palestinian unity agreements - and there have been a few - the announcement is the easy part.

Recall the February 2007 Mecca Accords and last April's unity agreement - each either collapsed rather quickly or was never even implemented. In the case of last April's unity agreement, many of the key details were left to be resolved. Such is the case today. Will finances be shared under the unity agreement? Will Hamas agree to disband, let alone agree to recognize previous PLO agreements (including recognition of Israel)?

Another key question is: just how independent would such a transitional government be? The approach adopted last April, while calling for a technocratic government, also called for an outside steering committee comprised of Hamas and Fatah that would provide direction to the government.

Such directional control would have been enough for such a government to be considered untouchable by the United States, and probably the other members of the Quartet. These kinds of critical details will need to be addressed before the two sides reconvene in Cairo on February 18 as they have agreed to do.

Perhaps the more interesting question is why, after just last week when Fatah officials criticized Hamas for failing to consult in earnest, did the two sides come together with today's shotgun announcement?

Two sets of shifting, interrelated regional dynamics are at play here. First, both Fatah and Hamas have effectively lost their respective patrons - Mubarak in the former case, and Assad in the latter. This has created something of a vacuum that has led to a second phenomenon: other regional players stepping in to try to help encourage Palestinian developments along.

Over the past month, Jordan has shepherded talks with Israel in an effort to guide the two parties back to final status negotiations. Amidst intensive Jordanian diplomatic efforts, the Qataris called Abbas and Khaled Meshal to Doha, and apparently made them an offer they couldn't refuse. It remains to be seen if Abbas said yes as a polite guest, or if he is serious about moving forward.

In all likelihood, Abbas probably said yes in order to create options for himself and create two parallel tracks - a potential negotiating track brokered by the Jordanians and the Quartet, and a reconciliation track brokered by Qatar. Such an approach will not be welcomed by many in the region - Israel has already registered its strong opposition - and others such as Jordan and the United States will also likely tell Abbas that he can only have one approach: negotiations with Israel that do not include Hamas. Yet, Abbas will want to keep his options open.

It is possible that this time is different, and that the region's uprisings have so altered Palestinian politics that real reconciliation will now ensue, leading to new elections later this year. The fundamentals still argue against it: Fatah enjoys exclusive control of the West Bank and is fighting Hamas on the ground to keep it that way; similarly, Hamas is resisting any Fatah encroachment on their supremacy in Gaza, and it is inconceivable that the militant Islamist organization will relinquish control there should it lose elections.

Hence, PLO chairman and PA president Mahmoud Abbas must make some difficult choices now: reconcile with Hamas thereby establishing greater Palestinian unity but incurring greater international (and possibly regional) isolation and risk losing his Fatah party's remaining control in a region quickly giving rise to Islamist parties. Or partner with the initiative launched by neighboring Jordan and endeavor to negotiate with Israel. He has long professed this latter option as his preference.

The views expressed in this article are solely those of Robert M. Danin

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