

Sacrificing the Palestinian struggle

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Fifth column, traitors, collaborators – this is what Hamas spokesmen call those whom they hold responsible for the civil war in the Gaza Strip. They point to a `treacherous stream in the Fatah movement,` warning that Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas is `incapable of taking control of it.` They are referring to Mohammed Dahlan and his associates.

Abbas` associates have a similar argument: A subversive stream in Hamas is revolting against the PA`s legitimate institutions, they say.

Each side accuses the other`s `treacherous stream` of being the puppet of foreign powers that dictate its actions. Iran and Islamic fundamentalists are cited as the influence driving Hamas, while the United States and Israel are said to be behind Fatah.

Each side is accusing the other of a half-overt plot. Hamas says Fatah tried to sabotage the elected Hamas government, and then the Palestinian unity government. Fatah says Hamas is holding on to its control in the Gaza Strip, and ignoring the acute economic, social and political deterioration this has caused, in order to take over the PLO.

Ironically, there is a grain of truth in both sides` accusations.

As the number of people murdered and wounded in the internecine Palestinian fighting increases by the hour, and the fear grows that the fighting will spill over into the West Bank, it is hard to see that the two sides are mirror images. Both camps are turning all civilians into hostages, and sentencing them to death in their street fights, sacrificing the struggle for Palestinian liberation on the altar of their rivalry.

However, there is one important difference between the movements. While Fatah`s leaders are out of Gaza – staying abroad or in the West Bank – Hamas` leaders have not abandoned their people.

Hamas decided this week to take over the positions of security forces loyal to Abbas, arguing that this was the only way it could stop the killings and crimes of the `treacherous stream.` But the move is in fact a statement that Hamas is the `real sovereign in Gaza.` Hamas is following in the footsteps of Yasser Arafat, who surrounded himself with paramilitary forces that Israel accepted. He regarded them as his badge of sovereignty.

Arafat`s forces had weapons and military affectations, and their leaders developed warm relations with senior Israeli defense officials – even after they left the military and became business partners. All this did not stop the process that was turning the Oslo Accords into an accelerated construction project in the settlements and shrinking the area for the

Palestinians.

And then, in September 2000, the intifada erupted. What began as a popular uprising was soon hijacked by the cult of armed struggle. The weapons and empty military affectations merely nurtured Israel`s policy of slicing up Palestinian territory.

Following the formation of the Hamas government, Abbas has asked for - and received - permission from Israel and the United States to bring arms into the Gaza Strip. The limited use of these weapons is now evident. Fatah`s forces are weak not because they are short of weapons, but because the Fatah movement, which failed to keep its promise that Oslo would lead to an independent state, is not offering a new action plan vis-a-vis the Israeli occupation.

As Fatah`s mirror image, the Hamas government announced it cannot pay civil servants` wages. But it has found ways to finance the large amount of weapons being smuggled into the Gaza Strip and purchased in the West Bank.

Now it will have full `military` control of the Gaza Strip. Will this bring relief to Gaza`s 1.4 million residents? Will it improve the health system and ensure employment for university graduates? Will it remove Israel`s land and sea blockade?

It may be assumed that the military takeover of Abbas` symbols of `sovereignty` will serve as an excuse for Israel to sever once and for all the remaining civilian and economic ties between the Gaza Strip and West Bank - a political process Israel started in 1991. Because Hamas, like its mirror image Fatah, has no coherent liberation or independence plan for Palestinians in this lifetime.

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