

Transcription of Islam and Contemporary Palestine Conference

20 May 2007, Grand Park Hotel, Ramallah

Dr. Mahdi (contd.): I don't need to introduce Khalil Shikaki, I know him for many years now from the old days and I learned a lot from his experience, but I don't see him changing his shirt or changing his face or changing his heart as much as I see him changing as much about his analysis based on polls and reflecting his position. I hear a lot about his presentation in Europe and the West. He has been very active in portraying these issues and respecting his background and respecting his academic values of portraying things to introduce him to you and I'm very happy that he's sharing this session but I hope he will not disappoint me but I hope he will not disappoint us by being very stingy and just covering the titles and covering only the synopsis of the issue. I want to provoke him and I want to encourage him to go in depth on these issues, otherwise there is no meaning for the whole idea of having such an exercise today. The topic is the rise of the Islamic movement in Palestine, the Palestinian political system and the crossroads between democracy and anarchy and I wonder whether anarchy reflects any ideas in your heads. The floor is yours and we are going to listen and put it on record, and please don't be stingy by just focusing on the synopsis.

Mr. Shikaki: Thank you Dr. Mahdi. The title is Mahdi's; don't blame me for the title.

Dr. Mahdi: The title is Mahdi's?

Mr. Shikaki: (laughing) The title is yours, I just followed orders.

Dr. Mahdi: But you agreed! This is a contract, this is commitment! So you are responsible now for this session, don't complain!

Mr. Shikaki:

I will try to answer four questions during my presentation. One is the rise of Hamas. When it happened and whether there are any viable alternatives to Hamas today, this will be the first topic that I will address. The second one, is going to be about the way the Palestinian political system accommodated the rise of Hamas and its assumption of power in 2006. And the third is going to be an attempt to explain why the accommodation process seems to have failed, why we are not able to live with Hamas in the Palestinian political system. The final question is going to be where we are headed, where we might go from here. Hopefully by raising all these issues and questions I will satisfy the Dr. Mahdi's thirst for controversy.

1.

Between 1993, when the Oslo process started and 2000, Hamas went into decline. The most important reason why this has been so is because Hamas failed to understand the new developments in the peace process and the focus of the Palestinians at that time on state-building; as a result the public punished Hamas. It punished it because Hamas lost touch with the feelings of the public, because Hamas was aiming at delaying the peace process, which was something that the public was certainly opposed to. Between 1996 and 2000 Hamas was in stagnation. Despite the fact that the peace process went into decline and despite the fact that between 1996 and 2000, the corruption of the Palestinian Authority became very apparent, Hamas wasn't able to

gain much out of that because it failed to take the initiative during this period. Between 2000 and 2006 Hamas took the initiative and as a result the public rewarded it in a magnificent manner. We saw clearly, with the outcome of the local elections in 2005, that Hamas was doing better from round to round. The last round in fact, in December 2005, showed Hamas winning in the cities in a significant way. But we have already seen in public opinion surveys that in 2003 and in 2004 Hamas was the largest political power in Palestinian society. Fateh came second to Hamas in 2003 and 2004. It wasn't until the death of Yasser Arafat that Fateh managed to put its act together and regain the initiative. But Fateh was soon to lose the initiative. By the end of 2005 the popularity of Hamas was again becoming a real threat to Fateh. On the day of elections as you know, Hamas won 44% of the popular vote to Fateh's 42%. The differences between the two are minor in terms of the popular vote, but not so in the actual distribution of seats given the nature of the Palestinian electoral system. In terms of its impact on election outcome, this system is not much different from the Turkish electoral system. The Islamists in Turkey won the elections with nearly 1/3 of the popular vote, but they actually won 2/3 of the seats in the Parliament. In our case, Hamas won 44% of the popular vote, but won 58% of the seats in the Parliament.

Now, is Hamas here to stay or is there a viable alternative to Hamas, where are we going from here? Well, let's ask the question in a different way. Why did we people desert Fateh? Why do some people vote for Fateh, and why do some people vote for Hamas? Of course there is also a third way. In Palestinian society, there are basically three trends. What I want to do is to answer the question about the viability of Fateh as an alternative to Hamas or the viability of third parties as an alternative to Hamas.

Number One: People go to Fateh because they expect Fateh to deliver a peace agreement with Israel. So if there is a viable peace process, as the case was, in the minds of the public in the mid 90's then people will turn to Fateh. If the peace process is not viable AND, as importantly, if people believe that violence pays, they will not turn to Fateh. If violence pays, it means it can help Palestinians achieve their national rights in ways that negotiations can not. Putting it differently: if the peace process is not viable and if more and more people believe that violence pays then they turn to Hamas. Now as far as the third parties are concerned, there isn't really much of a difference here between Fateh and Hamas. Although, for those who turn to third parties the viability of the peace process has a little more importance than the role of violence. In other words, those who go to third parties will do so only based on the viability, or lack of viability, of the peace process.

The second reason why people go to Hamas versus Fateh is linked to the role of traditions in society. If traditional values are important in people's minds, they turn to Hamas. If on the other hand, what matters is a little bit more than just traditional values; if people want a bit more liberal political values and if they want a bit more secularism they will turn to Fateh. For a third party, the question or the focus is here: they want a liberal secular society. For third parties you really have to be committed to liberalism and secularism. Fateh represents those Palestinians who value traditional values but also tend to be a little bit more liberal and a little bit more secular. Voters, the supporters of Hamas are those who don't want much liberalism or secularism in their political system.

The third factor that motivates people to vote is how they view Palestinian state building. For those who support Fateh, what is really important is the establishment of the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Period. Just to have a state. In their mind, state building therefore is very much about creating an independent state. For those who support Hamas, the question of establishing a state is still important, but it's not the act of state creation, but rather the nature of the state that matters. Voters of Hamas focus on clean governance. They want a government that is not corrupt. They want a state-building process that is not corrupt. Voters who vote for third parties do not focus as much as Fateh on state-building and do not focus as much as Hamas on corruption; instead they focus on the creation of a democratic political system. Third parties' voters tend to be a lot more democratic; Hamas voters tend to be people committed to clean government; and voters of Fateh focus on creating an independent state.

So, if these are the three motivating factors, is there any alternative, a viable alternative to Hamas today? In order for a viable alternative to emerge, conditions need to be ripe. In order for Fateh to win again, Fateh needs to restore confidence in the viability in the peace process. Can anyone here really say that in the near future we will be able to restore confidence in the peace process? I would say no. If we ask people today, is violence useful in ending the occupation? After what happened in south Lebanon, what happened in Gaza, I can say that indeed the majority of Palestinians do believe that violence pays and that Israelis do understand the language of violence. Therefore, it is more important for Palestinians to be resisting occupation by violence than by through negotiations or non-violent means. So as long as this is the case, the likelihood that Fateh will be able to recapture the imagination of Palestinians is not great.

The second reason is about traditional versus liberal and secular values. When do Palestinians ask for liberal, secular values? Only when there is domestic stability, tranquility and economic prosperity. A combination of economic prosperity and domestic security and political stability leads people to seek liberal, secular values. Threat of violence, instability, poverty lead people to seek refuge in traditional values. They go back to the family and religion. In Palestinian society therefore today, the greater the instability, the greater the poverty, the more likely that Hamas will win and Fateh will lose.

Let's take the last factor: which is about state-building. As long as Fateh is perceived as corrupt, as long as the process of state-building is perceived as corrupt, people will continue to turn to Hamas. If public demand is for democracy, rather than clean government or the simple creation of a state, then people will turn to third parties. As long as fighting corruption is the top of the priorities Hamas wins.

Based on what I've just said therefore, it doesn't seem like there is a viable alternative to Hamas today. If elections are held today, the outcome is going to be pretty much the same as we saw in January of 2006. Only when some of these three variables, or all of them, change will the behavior of the Palestinian voters change.

2.

My second issue that I want to raise is the political system and how the political system responded to the shock of Hamas. The Palestinian political system that was

created by the Fateh leadership and the Oslo process, a combination of Fateh leadership and the Oslo process, created a very authoritarian political system. Arafat was the center of this political system. The system was authoritarian because Arafat was authoritarian. When Arafat died, the system was no longer authoritarian. But it didn't become democratic. Simply because it was no longer authoritarian did not mean that the system would become democratic. After the death of Yasser Arafat the system became an inclusive one. The Palestinian political system became very inclusive because essentially it opened the door to the participation of Hamas in the formal political process, in the formal political institutions.

But while the system became more inclusive it was also becoming a lot more divisive than ever. The Oslo process created a very exclusive political system. Hamas was not welcomed into that political system. But when Arafat died Hamas saw an opportunity in joining the political system. With a Fateh leadership, weak leadership, Hamas saw its opportunity and Fateh didn't prevent it. Indeed, Fateh couldn't prevent the participation of Hamas in the elections even if it wanted to. The system became more inclusive as Hamas participated and other groups participated, but it also became more divisive. The divisions in the Palestinian system became even greater. The system became more dysfunctional. I'll explain in a minute why these things happened. The dysfunctionality of the system began to threaten everything the Palestinians have achieved. In terms of state-building, the transition to democracy was being threatened with abortion. The threat to internal peace, the threat of civil war, became greater. Peace with Israel became a thing of the past. All these characteristics of the political system lead to the instability that we've seen since the elections of Hamas.

Surprisingly, what has been positive about the last year and a half is that Hamas itself managed to integrate itself in the political system in a way that did not pose a serious threat to those Palestinians who disagreed with Hamas' worldview. Hamas' participation in fact reflected a great deal of surprising moderation on its part. Whether it is in terms of accepting the rules of the game, or the willingness to respect the social values of the Palestinians: there was no attempt on the part of Hamas to impose its value system. This facilitated a development whereby Fateh no longer saw Hamas as a serious threat, facilitated the creation of a national unity government. The national unity government was based on two objectives: preventing or aborting the threat or the dynamics of civil war, and a power-sharing arrangement. These two factors were very much interlinked. The power-sharing arrangement was counted on to play a leading role in preventing civil war. But as we saw during the last 10 days, this power-sharing arrangement is collapsing. It is collapsing to a great extent because Fateh continues to refuse to allow this arrangement to apply to the security sector.

Hamas had to act on its own when it took power by creating the "Executive Force." The creation of the executive force was the only way that Hamas believe would allow it to continue to remain in power. The executive force therefore was meant to protect the outcome of the elections that gave Hamas a majority. Hamas wanted to ensure that Fateh would not use its control over the security services to abort the outcome of the elections. But by doing so, Hamas also planted the seeds of civil war. The fact that even after the national unity government, Fateh refuses to even negotiate a power-sharing arrangement in the security realm indicates that there is possibility for

continued conflict and that the national unity government could collapse (something that I'll come back to when I talk about where we're heading).

3.

The third question that I want to raise is why. Why is this happening? Well, the first and perhaps the most important reason for this, I would say, is external. I'll come to the internal factors later, but there is no doubt that in this case, the external factor has the upper hand. The most important function for the Palestinian Authority is its ability to pay the salary of 160,000 people. If the Authority, at any time, even under Arafat and Fateh, was unable to pay the salaries, this would have meant the collapse of the Authority. But that is exactly what Israel and the United States have done after Hamas victory. They have taken away the reason for the PA to exist by refusing to transfer \$50-\$55 million each month which would have paid for 80% of the salaries. Israel has essentially deprived the Authority and Hamas of the ability to function. The alternative for Hamas would have meant that Hamas would turn to Iran. This would have created a strategic realignment in the Palestinian Authority. But to prevent that, the US had already imposed sanctions, financial sanctions by preventing the banks to transfer money to the Authority of Hamas. By doing so, rules that apply to the banks, apply to the banks in Iran as well, but also specifically apply to the banks in Palestine as well, because these banks could not accept money from any country if it was destined to go to Hamas' government. I don't blame the Europeans for the financial sanctions. I think they've played a minor role in all of this by conceding to the American demands. Their role, as I said, was secondary. Therefore the behavior of Israel and the United States essentially led the government to become impotent and the Authority to lose its ability to function.

The second factor has to do with how Fateh and Hamas responded to the shock of Hamas' victory. The essential problem in fact was not in Fateh, but in Hamas. Hamas interpreted its electoral victory as a total mandate, as a total embrace of Hamas, Hamas' views on the peace process and everything. And it wasn't perceived in the realm of what I talked about, 44% of the popular vote. Hamas interpreted it in terms of a victory in terms of seats, that is the 58% of the seats, so Hamas basically perceived this as a total majority...overwhelming victory for its value system. Of course this was not the case, because the majority in fact voted for non-Hamas parties. 56% of the vote went to the more liberal and secular and pro-peace-seeking groups, not to Hamas' views about liberalism and secularism and the peace process. This interpretation by Hamas of the nature of its victory was, I believe, at the root of the conflict that would emerge later with Fateh, because Hamas couldn't bring itself to see that its victory was very limited and that to govern it must implement fundamental changes in its own value system. Instead Hamas believed that it was a total embracement and as a result it was extremely difficult for it consider-- and today this still remains the case-- any strategic shift in its values system.

If we compare how this attitude/perception of the outcome of the elections with what happened in Fateh we can see the real difficulty. Fateh interpreted the outcome, of course, as a 2% difference: 42% to 44%. Such a small margin, Fateh believed did not justify any significant change from the course that Fateh had already charted, particularly given the fact that an additional 14% voted for secular liberal groups; groups that were even more secular and liberal than Fateh. So altogether Fateh interpreted its victory in the numbers that I presented with regard to the popular vote

and not with regard to the numbers of seats. So Fateh said "well, it's a defeat but it's not a major defeat." The second reason for Fateh's interpretation that tended to underestimate the outcome of the elections is that Fateh said: "Well, we have the presidency; we won the presidency by 63% of the vote. That's much greater than the 44% Hamas received." And thirdly, Fateh said: "we have the PLO!" It's the PLO, of course, that is the basis for Palestinian government, as well as the Palestinian Authority, because the PLO represents all Palestinians and Fateh controls the PLO.

In addition to all of that of course, Fateh tended to view Hamas as an outsider, as a foreign entity, a part of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan. It has nothing to do with Palestinian nationalism! It's a new, foreign agent. Fateh, essentially said, who created all of this: the Authority and the Hamas win; we made it possible for Hamas to become part of the political system and to participate in the elections and win in the elections. It was Fateh; it was asserted that created international acceptance of Palestinian identity. Then came Oslo, the PA, and the elections which Hamas won. Therefore, Fateh is essentially the "mother", if you wish. Hamas, in the best of circumstances, is a much younger "brother."

Dr. Mahdi: They don't see themselves as citizens of Palestine? They don't see themselves as living together for 40 years under occupation? Suddenly they come to distance themselves like this?

Mr. Shikaki:

Politics corrupts, no matter who is in politics. You can talk as much as you want as long as you are the head of PASSIA. When you become a minister I'm sure you'll talk differently.

Dr. Mahdi: I'm resigning from PASSIA!

Mr. Shikaki:

The third reason for the negative outcome in the post-election period, in terms of the inability of the system to deal with or accommodate the shock of Hamas's victory has to do with the nature of the system itself. The PA, during the 5 years preceding the outcome of these elections, had already become dysfunctional. Central government had already become weakened considerably with militias and with Arafat abdicating total responsibility. Arafat became irrelevant in the eyes of the international community. He, in turn, abdicated all responsibility. Israel targeted his security services. Militias took as much as they could of his authority. Financial constraints took a toll. Of course, the divisions within Fateh, the fragmentation. More recently similar trends emerged within Hamas with the militant groups within Hamas taking the lead in the Gaza Strip, groups that are a lot more militant and radical than the popular perception of what Hamas stands for, taking the initiative. This indicates that Hamas too might not be as disciplined as we believed it to be before the elections.

4.

Where are we heading from here is my last remark. One can say that it is all the growing pains of a society that is going through a transition to a democratic political system under very difficult conditions. This is my view. I believe that conflict is not inevitable between Fateh and Hamas, that the most interesting aspect of the process of accommodation between Hamas and the Palestinian political system is that Hamas

didn't seek to fundamentally alter that political system and instead sought integration within it and acceptance from others; it did not seek to overthrow the system once it has won the elections. This, to me, indicates that what is really at stake right now is to find the magic formula for power-sharing. And that magic formula has to be in security. There has to be an agreement between Fateh and Hamas on how to share power over the security services. If they do not, then we will continue to see the ups and downs of infighting continuing. I do not believe that there will be a total eruption of civil war. The societal values of Fateh and Hamas that have developed over the years, under occupation, will prevent the slide to total civil war.

I believe the last round of violence had a lot to do with the assumption within Hamas that it would not be possible to reach some accommodation with Fateh and Abu Mazen on power-sharing regarding the security services. And I still believe that this is possible, but I don't think it is being helped by the international community, particularly the Americans and the Israelis. I think that what the Americans are doing in terms of strengthening the presidential guard, and other forces of Fateh is playing into the negative dynamics regardless of what the intentions of the Americans are. I believe that the assumption within Fateh is that if the Americans think that Abu Mazen will share power over the security services with Hamas then most likely they are not going to support him financially. But this is exactly what he needs to do in order to abort the dynamics for a civil war, regardless of what the Americans do; he needs to do what he did in Mecca when he agreed to a power-sharing arrangement in the political realm. Now he needs to do it in the security realm. But this is where the American opposition is much greater and the Israeli opposition is much greater than at any time before. He will have to decide, whether American acceptance and Israeli willingness to talk to him and his security forces are more important than reaching a deal with Hamas. It's a very tough question but I believe that this is something that he needs to do and I believe that this is possible for him to do it and therefore my view is that I don't see Gaza separating from the West Bank. I don't see Gaza becoming an independent entity under the control of Hamas. I think Gaza and the West Bank will remain one territorial unit. Of course the Israelis have already severed the links between the two areas and this has already created a great deal of differences between the two societies, and what I spoke about earlier about the rise of Hamas is pretty much linked particularly in Gaza with the instability and poverty in the Gaza strip, when compared to the West Bank. That naturally means that Hamas will be much more popular and stronger in Gaza than in the West Bank. But I don't see this leading to total separation or the creation of two separate governments, one in the West Bank and in Gaza. There will be a great deal of temptation on the part of some Fateh elements to go for this, for two governments, one in Gaza and one in the West Bank if conditions continue to deteriorate. Nonetheless, I believe this is not going to work, there will be a great deal of public outcry against any attempt to do so and I don't think that Fateh will do it despite the infighting. My conclusion is that it is the growing pains of a young democracy under extremely difficult conditions.

Dr. Mahdi: Thank you Khalil very much. You did not disappoint me in the presentation because I think its rich and covering many aspects. But let's look into some corners in this presentation, not necessarily to understand what's wrong, but how to avoid the common painful process of the rise to democracy definitely not to go through the civil war, definitely not to have more bloodshed definitely, my nightmare

was, my real nightmare is to see this type of bloodshed and this type of confrontation, and to see this politics separating Gaza and the West Bank. But my starting point, I don't want to do only a historical background where you did only where Hamas was interested and reluctant to move in and let's start with this first chapter where you said "Hamas moved in, ran for elections and the perception that they portrayed themselves about winning in the election is more than in the real thing; why Fateh was content with other ideas with the presidency and the PLO." In that particular position, in the perception of the eyes of the domain, who was representing both parties? Were these two factions have incredible faces, names and maintaining their constituency strong and supporting them or where they collapsing? What I referred to as the absence of leadership in Fateh and the division within Fateh of groups as well as in Hamas, we saw in Hamas different points that they hold, Meshaal Abu Mazuk in Damascus, as well as in Gaza we had the two groups that we kept on differentiating between Haniyeh and Said Yassam as well as Zahar. We have people saying that Zahar Said Yassam in one camp and Haniyeh floating between Gaza and the others in the West Bank. This is the first one, the perception of the election and who represented this perception and empowerment in their eyes.

The second one where you were very very careful in introducing it, is that Hamas did not come to election to change or have a coup d'etat or change the system, they wanted to be integrated into the system while Fateh was not happy or willing to integrate them or have them in the system. Hamas wanted into the system and not to change the system, that's why they went through the election and want a unity government and want to share in the Parliament with the people. While Fateh looked at them as outsiders, there is a Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Egypt, they don't belong with us and it's a matter of time that they will not survive. Why could Fateh not see them as citizens and integrate them into the system? Is it because they had a personal problem, of leadership or no dialogue? They could not communicate. I have my agenda, you have your agenda but we don't have representatives to share it. We only have a dialogue with the devils, we have a dialogue with the Israeli's, with the U.S., we have different Muslim-Christian dialogues and different positions, but why don't we see Fateh and Hamas holding a dialogue about the system, having a real serious talk about this. The final point, which is the most important thing, Fateh will not allow Hamas to share the security system and Hamas created the executive forces to protect itself in the election, first of all, and two being integrated in the system, three to avoid having an inequality against them in the system. Now I'm one of the people who have been coming with an idea in order to mend all these factions, including the executive forces and Al Aqsa Brigade and others. [I think] that they should all be brought under the National Guard. Their loyalty will be to Palestine, to a system. One uniform, one system. Every Palestinian over the age of 18 should be enrolled in the National Guard, not like the IDF or like any other create, but rather we will create this harmony, this partnership, this belonging to Palestine and not executive forces for Hamas or a presidential force. Your point, Americans will not allow Hamas into the security force and that Americans will boycott Abu Mazen and this will collapse. Is there a way now, if I take you seriously that there is no coup d'etat and that there is no separation between West Bank and Gaza and there is no theory of conspiracy and it's all internal problem in Palestine? That these two people simply don't understand each other, that they're simply clashing in being integrated in the system and are failing, and that these two groups have their own power and they could not lead together. If we manage to bring them together, successfully into a national unity government and accept that Hamas is integrated into the system,

despite of the pressure of the Americans in the west, of course we have to work on a national development plan in order to avoid poverty and unemployment and other problems, can we see this painful democracy developing into a Palestinian statehood in the making? Khalil.

Mr. Shikaki:

Internally it has been the exaggerated perception each had of the outcome of the elections. This I believe was the most important to reason why both particularly at the beginning rejected compromise. Hamas also, of course believed that it could find alternative means to keep the Palestinian Authority functioning in terms of turning to Iran for financial support. The most important factor that helped to sustain Fateh's illusions that Hamas is not here to stay was the fact that Israel decided to deprive Hamas of the money, the ability to pay salaries is a fundamental function of the government. Once Israel said no money it meant that hopes of Fateh to take away power were nourished by this Israeli action. Fateh already had an exaggerated perception of the elections and then the Israeli's came along and then the Americans came along to basically abort any attempt by Hamas to overcome the difficulties imposed by Israel by imposing sanctions on banks. I also do not believe that it's impossible to share control over the security services with Hamas. Yes, the Americans will be very angry, the Israeli's will be very angry. But I think that both the Americans and the Israelis will value the continued existence of the Authority so much that they will tolerate a decision by Abu Mazen over the security services. It's going to be very tough and the Americans will be very angry and they might not even talk to Abu Mazen for a month or two and the Israeli's will in fact impose additional constraints in terms of dealing with the Palestinian security services. But I still think that Abu Mazen can find a way and that Hamas will show some, not much, but some flexibility, whereby Abu Mazin would continue to have exclusive control over some security services that are in contact with the Israelis. In other words, I do believe that it is possible to find a power-sharing formula that would allow Hamas a greater integration into the political system by sharing some control over the security sector.

Dr. Mahdi: Fine. I have mixed feelings with his presentation. In terms of- because of the environment that we are living in and because of a complicity of the issue, and because of the many baskets whether it's internal or not, so I would beg you for a minute to exclude the external factor and let's discuss in some details the internal factor. How can we, as a society, as people who love Palestine and cannot afford to see a civil war in the making, these ideas, this way of building public opinion and empowering, no matter what we like or don't like, president or no president, favored or unfavored leadership, just to build this idea, how, as you say, Hamas wants to be integrated into the system and not to undo the system while other people are thinking that there's a coup d'etat against the system. As well as Fateh willingly accepting to share power with Hamas, on the ground, in particular with the security issue, that I trust the security system and believe that it's not Fateh or Hamas, it's Palestine. How can we, I discuss this with some Europeans about the National Guard, and we discussed this idea with some NATO people and I received answer from you as avoiding it as against it. Help me to understand it.

Mr. Shikaki:

The National Guard issue isn't going to work and I'll tell you why. The idea that you can create a totally de-politicized security service, in my view, in the short run, isn't

going to work. For ten years, Fateh created a Fateh-based security service that became the security service of the Palestinian Authority. We didn't complain, we accepted that. Since it was the PLO that made Oslo and since the PLO is controlled by Fateh, we accepted that. We took it as a natural outcome that Fateh would have the security services under its control. This is, of course, unheard of in any other country in the world, except in conflict situations where people tolerate that for a while. But if you want to move towards a more democratic political system you cannot have the security service under the control of a political party, this is simply insane.

Hamas came to a situation in which it sought to integrate into the political system and found this reality. It did not accept it and tried to change it by reaching a power-sharing arrangement. Fateh did not agree. Hamas formed its own security service, a Hamas security service. Now, we have a Hamas security service and a Fateh security service, but we have no national authority, no PA security service. The way to move forward, in my view, is power-sharing for now, but it has to be power-sharing for a while until we are able to overcome the real difficulty of what to do, how do you create a real political democratic system. When the security services are in fact, the security services of political parties, none of them are security services of the Palestinian Authority. This is a challenge that can only be dealt with under more stable conditions. Under the current conditions, with the threat of civil war hanging over all our heads, there's absolutely no way that Fateh will agree to total de-politicization of the security services and it's the same with Hamas, it's absolutely unacceptable in their minds to do so while the threat of civil war is still hanging. Once the power-sharing mechanism is found, once the conditions on the ground are stable and Hamas feels a little bit more secure about the willingness of the political system to accept it, then perhaps we can talk about how to create your National Guard that is truly de-politicized

Dr. Mahdi: (sigh) Fine....can we have the mic over here?

Person A: Yes ok. I've been reading in the papers that there are 80,000 personnel in the security system. Why is it that we need all those personnel in the security system to start with? If it is true that there are 80,000 people.

Mr. Shikaki:

Of course, yes it is true. We don't need them; the Palestinian Authority doesn't need them. Fateh needs them! This is an almost entirely Fateh security service with the exception of the 5,000 that have been added by Hamas in terms of the executive force. But essentially, - well, there is also the PLO which is a national force and they are not completely Fateh, but is nonetheless in the past has traditionally been led by Fateh. On the day of elections, by the way, these national security forces, an overwhelming majority of them, 85% of them, voted for Fateh. So Fateh rewards its members by adding them to the security service. It serves a function for Fateh, not for the Palestinian people, not for the Palestinian Authority.

Person A: So it is a very big financial burden...on the Authority.

Mr. Shikaki:

It's not a question of money as much as a question of the politics of the issue.

Dr. Mahdi: Please. Abu Rami, I want you to comment on this. I want to understand where Fateh stands on this main thing. Because you are religious, he's military.

Abu Rami: (Arabic)

Dr. Mahdi: (Arabic)

Mr. Shikaki:

I agree with most of what Jibril said, with the exception of sharing control of the security services. For someone who was in charge of the security services that are entirely Fateh you are either very naïve or have absolutely no desire to share power with Hamas, political power with Hamas. You are either one of the two.

Dr. Mahdi: Let him finish please, listen to his analysis.

Mr. Shikaki:

You cannot create for ten years a security service that is entirely Fateh and appoint heads of security service who believe that in terms of chain of command, who believe that their president is the head of Fateh, is the Chief Commander Officer and then say, "Yeah, I'll give them to the government." This is the only way for the short term, you're absolutely right for the long-term. The only way that you can create a professional security service is by depoliticizing it. It has to be an independent force that doesn't belong to any political party, but in the short run, until you solve the problem which is already in existence, which is an entirely Fateh security force, until you deal with this, you have to share control of security service with Hamas. It doesn't have to be by creating a Hamas security force. It could mean that the president and the Prime Minister would have the same authority. That both of them can issue orders to the security services. It means that the president can delegate direct authority to the interior minister. This is how you share security control. It doesn't mean that you create independent security services that each one will be under a political party. Ultimately, I agree though. The only way that we can create a real Palestinian state, which is ultimately where we're heading which I believe is exactly where we're heading, is to create a force that belongs to the Authority and not to any of the political parties.

Dr. Mahdi: Sorry, it has to be the Sheikh Husseini...Ok, we expect you to come back.

Sheikh Adnan: (Arabic)

Dr. Mahdi: The question for Khalil. Can we overcome internal problems as he claims?

Mr. Shikaki:

I agree with you that the external factors are very important and I've listed Israel and the U.S. as being really, the most damaging factors in where we are today. But I also think that it is possible for us, despite this external pressure, to make an agreement and we've already demonstrated that with Mecca. The Mecca Agreement does represent, as Jibril said, a willingness on the part of Fateh and Hamas to share political power. What I find difficult for Fateh to do so far is to share security control and I think their difficulty with regard to security is exaggerated greatly because of the external factor. The position of the US and the position of Israel become, when it comes to security forces they're even more determined to that than what it comes to money. On the question of money, they are looking for ways to open up the PLO

account. But when it comes to security I think it will be even tougher for Israel and the United States to allow for this control over the security services. Nonetheless I still think it is possible to find a formula. Number one because I think a formula can be found that eventually will allow Abu Mazen to engage the Israeli's in terms of security coordination and at the same time find a way to give Hamas part of the control over the security services and the alternative is the collapse of the Palestinian Authority and I think neither Israel nor the United States wish to see that happen.

Dr. Mahdi: Can you move the mic please?

Participant: (Arabic)

Dr. Mahdi: Dr. Khalil, please. To simplify it in the terms that they are fighting for power, for ministerial posts, it is basically deeper than it seems to be.

Mr. Shikaki:

We can view what's happening in Gaza as a struggle for power. Of course it's a struggle for power, but it's happening after an election in which one party won the elections. Therefore this is the context for the struggle for power. It is a legitimate struggle for power, it's not like gangsters fighting. One party that won the elections is unable to govern, for various reasons it's unable to govern. In this particular instance, what happened during the last 10 days, I believe, has a great deal with who controls the security services and will Hamas, will the Interior Minister have some control, some shared control with the President and other Fateh commanders or will the control of the security services, with the exception of the Executive Force, remain exclusively in the hands of the president and Fateh. This is the reason why they're fighting and I think they'll stop the fighting. But unless they find a way to deal with this issue, they will be fighting again and again and again. But I don't think we have reached the point where we will see the separation of Gaza from the West Bank.

Dr. Mahdi: Thank you very much; we will come back to this question after the break because we have to move to session 2. I would like to thank Dr. Khalil for his remarks. Of course this is painful, of course this is frightening, but this is the painful way to move towards democracy. This is a way of seeing a future Palestinian state in the making in spite of the painful process that we see today. His final remark that there will not be separation between Gaza and the West Bank, there will not be more fragmentation, but this is, as he portrays it, a painful process towards a democracy. Thank you very much.