



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Can Hamas be trusted when it says it wants to disarm?



Hamas leaders often say that they are ready to compromise regarding the conflict with Israel in Gaza. However, what they consider a compromise has little chance of being accepted by other actors.

Khalil Al-Hayya, Hamas's second man in Gaza, **said** last week that they were ready to accept a five-year truce and lay down their weapons if an independent Palestinian state along the 1967 borders is established.

Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of this terrorist organisation, spoke before Al-Hayya about the same elements of compromise, as seen by Hamas.

He also expressed Hamas's readiness to lay down arms and dissolve its military wing if a Palestinian state is established along the 1967 borders in a conversation with Hakan Fidan, the head of Turkish diplomacy, in Doha.

"They have told me that following the establishment of the Palestinian state, Hamas would no longer need an armed wing and they would continue as a political party", said Minister Fidan after the conversation with the head of Hamas.

Motives for a shift

The motives guiding Hamas's leadership to talk about disarmament, a long truce, and conditioning the status of a Palestinian state are multiple.

This is the first time that the leadership of the Palestinian militant organisation has talked about its own disarmament since its establishment in the late 1980s.

The hint about laying down arms and focusing solely on political actions could also imply that Hamas has abandoned the principles upon which it was established.

This causes caution and even doubts about the sincerity of the initiative. The previous contradictory statements of Hamas leaders regarding their armed struggle against Israel

contribute to the general scepticism.

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However, the Hamas leadership has been repeating its positions on possible disarmament as a way to achieve as much as possible and save face in front of its supporters, while the Israeli campaign in Gaza has been destroying the last parts of Hamas' military potential.

This desire of the Hamas leaders indicates that they have faced a crisis because they risk a lot when discussing disarmament. Above all, they risk the favour of their militant supporters among the Palestinians, because disarmament also represents giving up the original goal—to compensate for what they claim Yasser Arafat and the PLO were unable to achieve using diplomacy with a military conflict with Israel.

Loss of Hamas identity

Hamas's latest shift leaves room for caution given their readiness to accept the two-state model—Israel and Palestine—which goes against the widespread belief among radical Palestinians that the Israeli state should not exist.

With these two proposals—disarmament and a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders—Hamas risks losing its extremist and military identity, with which it managed to establish and maintain control and terror in Gaza for years.

However, its leaders seem willing to accept that risk, even though turning into a political organisation would erase the principal difference compared to the Palestinian Authority, its main competitor.

The lack of major reactions from Israel and its

partners suggests that Hamas' signals were not considered seriously enough to warrant further examination.

The priorities of Israel's military action in Gaza, according to the Benjamin Netanyahu administration, continue to be destroying Hamas and averting the prospect of another attack on the country.

Israel considers Hamas's softening to be a sign of weakness rather than a relevant proposal for resolving the conflict that should be considered more seriously.



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The conciliatory tone adopted by Hamas leaders is also an attempt to oppose the mainstream of peace initiatives within the framework of the Cairo process, which has put the Palestinian extremists under strong pressure.

US State Secretary Antony Blinken openly showed this during the ongoing, new tour of Middle Eastern capitals, demanding that Hamas accept the new Israeli proposals, which, according to him, have been "extraordinarily generous".

"Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily, extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel, and at this moment, the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a cease-fire is Hamas," said Secretary Blinken in Riyadh.

While these Israeli proposals have not been

published, unofficially they show a softening of the current position of Mr Netanyahu's government by reducing the number of hostages whose release is requested.

Hamas is in a negotiating crisis

However, behind Hamas's new rhetoric is the desire for the organisation to influence the course of negotiations as much as possible, instead of being faced with proposals created by the other side, in cooperation with Arab partners.

In this respect, Hamas leaders highlighted their desire to collaborate with rival Fatah in the future administration of Gaza, a significant shift given that they have controlled the Strip independently since 2007.

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Participants in the peace process have more than enough reason to doubt Hamas' willingness to make the shift its leaders have been talking about.

The history of Hamas' activity is inextricably linked to the use of violence and the desire to destroy Israel, so the announcements about potential disarmament (under certain conditions) could be convincing to a few, particularly to Israel, which will emphasise to its partners in the peace process the unreliability of Hamas' proclaimed intention.

The risks that the Hamas leadership would face if their recommendations were to be implemented are too significant and would definitely result in personal dishonour among their supporters and the loss of their current position.

Hints of disarmament and acceptance of the idea of two states are more indicative of

Hamas's current crisis and its attempt to survive as a decisive factor in future solutions for the Palestinians.