



IPS INSIGHTS

Perspectives On the Issues Shaping Policy

Hamas Steps Aside in Gaza: A Tactical Retreat or a Strategic Repositioning?

Tughral Yamin¹

In war, victories are not achieved only on the battlefield. Political decisions often shape the outcome of conflicts far more profoundly than military engagements. Hamas's decision to dissolve its civilian administration in the Gaza Strip after nearly two decades of governance is one such development. At first glance, it appears to be an administrative adjustment. In reality, it represents a carefully calculated political manoeuvre intended to reshape the diplomatic landscape surrounding Gaza.

For almost twenty years, Hamas has been the *de facto* governing authority in Gaza. It controlled not only its military wing but also schools, hospitals, municipal services, policing and civil administration. This dual role enabled Israel and many Western governments to argue that Hamas exercised complete authority over Gaza and therefore bore responsibility for the enclave's condition.

By voluntarily relinquishing its civilian administration, Hamas is attempting to change that narrative.

The immediate catalyst appears to be the prolonged deadlock over the second phase of the US-brokered ceasefire initiative. The transition to the next phase of negotiations had stalled, with each side accusing the other of obstructing progress. The announcement by Hamas is clearly intended to convince Washington, regional mediators and the

international community that it is prepared to make political compromises if they lead to an end to the war and the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

This is strategic communication in its purest form. The movement is sending several messages simultaneously. The first is directed at the United States. Hamas wants to demonstrate that it is not the principal obstacle to peace. The second message is aimed at Arab governments and the wider international community, which have consistently demanded an independent administrative mechanism for Gaza after the conflict. The third message targets global public opinion by portraying Hamas as willing to separate governance from armed resistance.

The transfer of authority is equally significant. Mohammed al-Farra, who headed Hamas's civilian administration, has resigned and the Government Emergency Committee has been dissolved. Civilian responsibilities are to be transferred to the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) – an UN-backed body composed of independent Palestinian technocrats operating under international supervision. Such an arrangement could provide greater international legitimacy and potentially facilitate humanitarian operations and reconstruction.

This move also seeks to remove one of Israel's principal justifications for maintaining military

¹ Brig (r) Dr Tughral Yamin is a Senior IPS Associate

control over Gaza. Israel has repeatedly argued that as long as Hamas governs the territory, military operations remain necessary to prevent it from rebuilding its capabilities. By stepping away from civilian governance, Hamas attempts to weaken that argument and shift international attention towards ending the occupation and accelerating reconstruction.

The humanitarian dimension cannot be overlooked. Gaza's infrastructure has suffered catastrophic destruction. Hospitals, schools, water systems, electricity networks and residential neighbourhoods require reconstruction on an unprecedented scale. International donors have been reluctant to invest billions of dollars while Hamas remained the official governing authority. A technocratic administration operating under international oversight could encourage donor confidence, facilitate humanitarian assistance and expedite reconstruction efforts.

Yet this political initiative has obvious limitations. Most importantly, Hamas has not announced any intention to disarm. Its military wing and internal security structures remain intact. From Israel's perspective, this is the central issue. Israeli leaders argue that changing the administrative structure without dismantling Hamas's armed capability merely changes the label while leaving the underlying security challenge unresolved.

Practical obstacles also remain formidable. The National Committee for the Administration of Gaza currently operates from Cairo because Israel has not permitted its members to enter Gaza. Consequently, the proposed transition exists largely on paper rather than on the ground. Effective governance cannot be exercised remotely, particularly in a territory facing an acute humanitarian crisis.

Israel has dismissed the announcement as little more than political theatre. Israeli officials contend that approximately 40,000 Hamas-appointed civil servants and police personnel will continue performing their duties under the designation of technical staff. From this perspective, the administrative machinery remains largely unchanged despite the formal dissolution of the government.

Whether one views Hamas's decision as genuine political compromise or tactical repositioning depends largely on one's perspective. Supporters argue that it reflects political pragmatism and recognition that Gaza requires an internationally acceptable governing mechanism. Critics maintain that Hamas has merely shed the burdens of governance while preserving its military influence.

Perhaps both interpretations contain elements of truth. Throughout history, resistance and revolutionary movements have frequently distinguished between political authority and military capability when circumstances demanded. Such adaptations allow them to preserve their core strength while responding to changing political realities. Hamas's latest move fits this well-established pattern.

The coming weeks will determine whether this initiative represents the beginning of a meaningful political transition or simply another chapter in the long and complex struggle over Gaza's future. Everything now depends on whether Israel, the United States, regional mediators and the international community are prepared to respond with reciprocal political steps. If they do, Gaza may finally begin moving from war towards reconstruction. If they do not, Hamas's dissolution of its civilian government may be remembered not as a breakthrough but as another missed opportunity in one of the world's most intractable conflicts.

