



## Muhammad Dahlan and His Possible Involvement in "The Day After" in the Gaza Strip

November 24, 2024

### Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ In attempts to find a party to manage the Gaza Strip "the day after," the name of Muhammad Dahlan, a senior Fatah figure in exile in the UAE, has occasionally come up as a potential candidate oversee Gaza's administration after the war, at least temporarily. In September 2024, the Fatah leadership under Mahmoud Abbas decided to promote a reconciliation initiative with Dahlan and other ousted Fatah members.
- ▶ Dahlan's name emerged prominently due to his involvement in Gaza during the war through UAE humanitarian aid efforts and his political connections with various Gaza figures, including Yahya al-Sinwar, who was head of the Hamas political bureau until he was killed in October 2024.
- ▶ Muhammad Dahlan himself has denied the reports, claiming he refuses to take on any security, governmental or executive role and was solely focused on humanitarian aid activities.
- ▶ Born in Khan Yunis in the Gaza Strip, Dahlan was a prominent figure in the "middle generation" of Fatah leadership. Following the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) he held senior roles, including head of the preventive security forces in Gaza and minister of civilian affairs. As part of his role he engaged in political and security discussions with Israeli officials, but after the outbreak of the second intifada his name was mentioned in connection with to terrorist activities against Israel.
- ▶ In 2011, Dahlan was expelled from Fatah over claims he attempted to overthrow PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas. He relocated to the UAE, becoming a close advisor to President Muhammad bin Zayed. meanwhile he worked to maintain his status within the PA through political alliances and by strengthening ties with Hamas in Gaza.
- ▶ In ITIC assessment, reconciliation talks between Fatah and Dahlan can be expected to continue, as they serve both sides. For the PA, they represent an opportunity to draw closer

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<sup>1</sup> Click <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en> to subscribe and receive the ITIC's daily updates as well as its other publications.

to the UAE and Gulf States, which were expected to play a central role in Gaza's reconstruction after the war. For Dahlan, the process helps strengthen his standing within the PA as a potential leader after the Mahmoud Abbas era, especially if Marwan Barghouti remains imprisoned in Israel during negotiations with Hamas over the release of the hostages. Dahlan also has the advantage of not currently being associated with the PA leadership and was recognized as a prominent rival to Mahmoud Abbas and the leadership, which was widely perceived as corrupt by the public.



**Muhammad Dahlan (Watan, February 14, 2024)**

## Further Information

### Efforts for a reconciliation with Dahlan

- ▶ Since late August 2024, there have been increasing reports regarding initial reconciliation efforts between the Fatah movement, led by PA chairman Mahmoud Abbas, and the Democratic Reformist Stream, headed by Muhammad Dahlan. Dahlan, a former senior Fatah figure and head of the PA's preventing security forces in the Gaza Strip, was expelled from the movement in 2011 and now lives in exile in the UAE.
- ▶ According to "Palestinian sources in Fatah," Mahmoud Abbas was "seriously prepared" to reinstate expelled activists. That comes after meetings between Hussein al-Sheikh, secretary general of the PLO Executive Committee, and senior figures from the Democratic Reformist Stream, Samir al-Mashharawi and Jaafar al-Hadib, under instructions from Mahmoud Abbas. The sources said Abbas was willing because he recognized the influence of Dahlan and his faction in Gaza, the refugee camps in Judea and Samaria and Lebanon, as well as the desire to secure support and funding from Gulf States with close ties to Dahlan. "Sources close to Dahlan" noted the need to reintegrate all expelled figures into the movement, from leaders to mid-level members (Independent in Arabic, August 25, 2024).
- ▶ According to another report, Jordan exerted pressure on Mahmoud Abbas to take several "vital" steps to prevent the PA's collapse. One such step involves reconciliation within Fatah,

including with prominent figures like Dahlan. The report noted talks between senior Jordanian and Fatah officials to promote the issue, with Jordan even asking the UAE to intervene (Rai al-Youm, September 3, 2024).

►After a Fatah Central Committee<sup>2</sup> meeting held by Mahmoud Abbas on September 9, 2024, "senior Fatah officials" reported that the movement's leadership had decided to promote a reconciliation with all expelled Fatah members, including Dahlan's faction. According to the sources Dahlan's deputy, Samir al-Mashharawi, had held talks with several Fatah officials, including Hussein al-Sheikh, and demanded the reinstatement of all faction members into Fatah and the security apparatuses, along with cancelling their convictions. However, Dahlan himself was reportedly not interested in returning at this stage (al-Sharq, September 11, 2024).

►Although no significant progress was reported in the following weeks, both sides expressed a desire for internal reconciliation. Fatah spokesman in Gaza, Munther al-Hayek, said that as part of rebuilding the movement, they had decided to reintegrate all those who had left. He added that the Central Committee was handling all related files, including those concerning Muhammad Dahlan. He claimed that internally, Fatah was "united and healthy," and anyone who left the movement was a loss to it and the "national project" (Radio al-Alam, October 17, 2024). Democratic Reformist Stream spokesman Imad Mohsen stated that they were open to dialogue leading to Fatah's unity, adding that everyone sought unity regardless of their opinions. He said that the procedures leading to Dahlan's expulsion were flawed and illegal, noting that committees had also rejected the "false accusations" against him (Radio al-Alam, October 17, 2024).

►Fatah Revolutionary Council member Fakhri al-Barghouti claimed that Hussein al-Sheikh stood to gain the most from reconciliation talks with Dahlan and his faction, as it could help repair his strained relations with the UAE following a meeting between him and UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan in late April 2024. In a conversation with a site known for its opposition to the PA, al-Barghouti dismissed the reconciliation talks as "empty and meaningless," arguing that there was no genuine intention to reconcile with all factions within the movement, including himself and his colleagues on the Freedom List during the 2021 Legislative Council elections led by Nasser al-Qudwa and Fadwa al-Barghouti. He also noted

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<sup>2</sup> Fatah's Central Committee was its highest body responsible for decision-making regarding the movement's structure. According to the Fatah Charter, the committee consists of 21 permanent members who were directly elected by the movement's delegates during the Fatah conference.

that neither he nor other senior Fatah leaders had been informed of the substance of the talks between al-Sheikh and al-Mashharawi (al-Shahid, October 18, 2024).

► There were few reactions on the social media to the potential unity. Some supported the reconciliation while others opposed it. One social media user noted, "Hard work in preparation for the day after. [Mahmoud] Abbas received top-down orders to reset the system" (Yusuf Bara's X account). Another user said, "It's too late for any reform or reconciliation; I say leave it as it is because it will bring us back to square one and lead to civil war" (Adeeb Riyah's X account). A third user wrote, "Anyone wanting to reform Fatah should not turn it into a tool for the Emirates and Israel but rather return it to its people and roots" (Muhammad Abu Shamila's X account).

► Palestinian public opinion polls indicate that Dahlan's standing has improved as a potential successor to Mahmoud Abbas since the war began, though he is still not seen as the leading candidate. According to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research headed by Dr. Khalil Shikaki, a poll published in December 2023, the first since the outbreak of the war, showed Dahlan with only 4% support compared to 36% for Marwan Barghouti, 19% for Ismail Haniyeh, and 16% for Yahya al-Sinwar. By June 2024, Dahlan's support had risen to 8% versus 27% for Barghouti and 14% for Haniyeh. In the latest poll from September 2024, Dahlan reached 10%, while Barghouti stood at 37% and al-Sinwar at 30%.<sup>3</sup>

### **Dahlan's activity in the Gaza Strip during the war**

► Mahmoud Abbas' position has changed after years of bitter rivalry with Muhammad Dahlan, in light of Dahlan's prominent involvement in the Gaza Strip since the war began and Abbas' aspiration to restore PA control over the Strip "the day after" the war ends, for the first time since Hamas's takeover in 2007.

► Dahlan, who is close to UAE President Muhammad bin Zayed, is perceived as behind the UAE's humanitarian aid operation for Gaza announced by bin Zayed on November 5, 2023. As part of Operation Faithful Knight 3, described as "the largest UAE aid operation for Gaza," hundreds of tons of aid were delivered by air and sea to displaced residents in Gaza. The UAE also established a field hospital in Gaza and transferred patients and the injured to hospitals in the UAE. Volunteers from Faithful Knight 3 participated in a polio vaccination campaign for children in Gaza in September 2024 (Operation Faithful Knight 3 website, September 18, 2024; Democratic Reformist Stream website, September 9, 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> Isma'il Haniyeh was killed in July 2024 and al-Sinwar was killed in October 2024.

►According to reports, thousands of activists from the Dahlan-affiliated Democratic Reformist Stream organize the distribution of humanitarian aid arriving in the Strip's displaced persons camps and humanitarian zones. "Knowledgeable sources" also stated that the Reformist Stream played a central role in organizing and funding local committees, particularly by providing the guards and equipment needed for transporting humanitarian aid (al-Sharq, March 16, 2024). In addition, activists from the Egyptian branch of the Reformist Stream visited injured Gazans in Egyptian hospitals as part of the "Gaza in Our Hearts" campaign (Reformist Stream website, July 7, 2024).



**Delivering aid from the UAE to the Gaza Strip  
(Democratic Reformist Stream website, April 17, 2024)**

►According to "knowledgeable Palestinian sources," for the first time, representatives from Muhammad Dahlan's stream participated in a meeting of Palestinian organizations in Rafah in March 2024. Previously, contacts were held between Dahlan and the Hamas leadership abroad, during which he stated his desire to contribute to the delivery of humanitarian aid and claimed that his actions were not driven by political motives. According to the sources, Dahlan and his associates' presence provided a vital communication channel on the ground with the IDF, the Egyptians or international bodies responsible for bringing aid into Gaza al-Akhbar, March 18, 2024).

## **Dahlan as a candidate to manage Gaza after the war**

►Given Dahlan's involvement in Gaza in general and since the war began in particular, his name has been mentioned several times by various parties, including Israel, as someone who could manage the Strip "the day after" the war. According to reports, in discussions about arrangements between Israel and Hamas, Dahlan's name came up as a candidate to oversee Gaza temporarily after the war. According to the reports, "sources" in Israel, the United States and Arab mediating countries have expressed support for Dahlan heading a security force which will be established in Gaza as a temporary solution. It has also been claimed that in

talks with mediators, Hamas moderated its opposition and signaled willingness to accept Dahlan as an interim solution to end the war (Wall Street Journal, July 25, 2024).

► Muhammad Dahlan has denied the reports, stating that various scenarios about "the day after this destructive war waged by the Israeli occupation" were repeatedly presented or leaked to the media, and his name was sometimes raised "to spark some excitement." He emphasized his refusal to take on any security, governmental or executive role, noting that his presence in Gaza was solely to deliver aid sent by the UAE, with ending the war being his top priority. He added that any solutions had to be part of national Palestinian understandings which would rebuild the Palestinian political system transparently and democratically, with an international framework to realize Palestinian aspirations for an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital (Muhammad Dahlan's X account, July 25, 2024).

► Dahlan has consistently expressed his refusal to assume a leadership role in the PA. In several interviews since the war began, he reiterated that he was not interested in becoming the future leader of a restructured PA,<sup>4</sup> despite claims that he was exploiting the war to position himself as Gaza's new ruler and a leading contender in the succession race for the PA leadership after Mahmoud Abbas.

► In February 2024, Dahlan visited Qatar and met with the "external" Hamas leadership. According to reports he was warmly received and held meetings with Ismail Haniyeh, then head of Hamas's political bureau, and Qatari officials (al-Arabi, February 15, 2024). While details of the meeting were not revealed, "Palestinian sources" claimed that the discussions revolved around "the day after" (Israeli TV news channel N12, February 20, 2024). A "senior Fatah official" stated that the ongoing cooperation between Hamas and Dahlan was "worrisome," as it threatened to separate Gaza from the West Bank and undermined the "Palestinian political entity" (al-Sharq, March 16, 2024).

## Appendix 1: Milestones in Dahlan's Career

### Biography

► Muhammad Dahlan, aka Abu Fadi, was born on September 29, 1961, in the Khan Yunis refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. His family fled to Gaza in 1948 from Hamama, near Ashqelon. In 1981, he helped establish the shabiba, Fatah's youth movement. In 1987, he was detained

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<sup>4</sup> For additional statements by Muhammad Dahlan, see Appendix 2.

by Israel for his involvement in the first intifada and was exiled to Jordan. From there he moved to Tunisia and joined the Fatah movement, being promoted after gaining the trust of PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

### **Head of the PA preventive security forces**

►In 1994, following the Oslo Accords, Dahlan returned to Gaza and was appointed head of the PA preventive security forces. He prevented numerous attacks and dealt harshly with the Islamic opposition led by Hamas. He developed connections with the Israeli government under Yitzhak Rabin and with the CIA, which assisted in establishing the security forces and provided surveillance equipment. Through those connections he coordinated joint operations and prevented terrorist attacks planned by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Haaretz, January 20, 2020).

►In 2002 he resigned, apparently hoping to be appointed minister of the interior. However, Arafat instead offered him a role as security advisor, which Dahlan refused; Rashid Abu Shabak, his deputy, was appointed head of the preventive security forces. Nevertheless, Dahlan continued to exert considerable influence over the agency's operations.

### **Roles in the PA governments**

►When Mahmoud Abbas became "prime minister" of the PA in 2003, Dahlan became a key ally, especially in Gaza, where Abbas' position was weak. The alliance allowed Dahlan to elevate himself from a local power figure in Gaza to a significant national figure. The strategic partnership peaked with Dahlan's appointment as minister of security in 2003, effectively making him Abbas' right-hand man and the strongest figure in the PA government. Following Abbas' resignation as "prime minister" that same year, Dahlan also resigned and refused to join the government of Abu Alaa.

►The death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004 and Mahmoud Abbas' election as PA "president" in January 2005 strengthened Dahlan's position. He was appointed minister of civilian affairs, overseeing coordination for Israel's 2005 disengagement from Gaza. He liaised with Israeli and American officials on security matters, such as deploying Palestinian police in Gaza, and civilian issues, including reopening the Rafah Crossing and operating "safe passage" routes between Judea and Samaria and Gaza.

►As part of coordination for the disengagement, Dahlan met with the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, Maj. Gen. Yosef Mishlav, at the Erez Crossing on July 10, 2005. Palestinian media and PA spokesmen welcomed the agreements reached during the

meeting and emphasized the importance of continued coordination on the disengagement (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, July 10, 2005). According to reports, Dahlan also updated Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Said Siyam on his talks with Mislav (al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, July 11, 2005).

►At the end of November 2005, Dahlan resigned to run as a Fatah candidate in the January 2006 Legislative Council elections, in which he narrowly won as the representative of Khan Yunis. In July 2007, following Hamas' violent takeover of Gaza, Dahlan left the Strip and resigned as national security advisor. In August 2009, he was elected to Fatah's Central Committee.



**Muhammad Dahlan (right) at a press conference on the Rafah Crossing (al-Jazeera, November 2005)**

## Involvement in terrorism

►Over the years, Muhammad Dahlan has maintained relationships and negotiations with Israeli and American officials. He participated in the Camp David talks in 2000, where, according to Israeli sources, he presented relatively moderate views. During the second intifada he publicly took a comparatively moderate position, attempting to prevent attacks within Israel and continuing his connections with Israeli and American leaders. He criticized the activities of Hamas and the PIJ, calling the second intifada a mistake that could sink the PA into internal conflicts and chaos. He argued that Palestinians should focus their actions against Israel only in the 1967 territories and engage exclusively in "popular resistance." However, such positions had a negative effect on his public image among Palestinians.

►On the other hand, Israeli security officials accused Dahlan of involvement in terrorist activities, primarily through his close associate Rashid Abu Shabak and members of the preventive security forces. He was also implicated in an attack on a bus transporting children

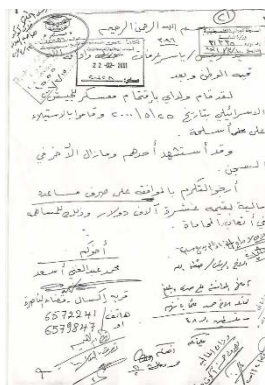


near Kfar Darom in Gush Katif.<sup>5</sup> In April 2004, reports claimed the CIA had recordings of Dahlan instructing his operatives to carry out the attack. A report prepared by the IDF, listing attacks attributed to Dahlan, was submitted to the Israeli Prime Minister at the time, Ariel Sharon. Victims of the attack filed a lawsuit against Dahlan, and a court ruling held him accountable, requiring him to pay 44 million shekels to the victims' families (Case 7036/19, October 7, 2021).

► A legal opinion by Palestinian affairs expert Eviatar Alon argued that Dahlan, as head of the preventive security forces, had been directly responsible for a series of deadly attacks in Gaza since the outbreak of the second intifada, including the Kfar Darom bus attack. Ehud Olmert also pointed to Dahlan and his deputy as the primary suspects behind the attack ("Muhammad Dahlan and the Future of Gaza," Misgav Institute, January 21, 2024).

► Additional evidence from seized documents and detainee interrogations during Operation Defensive Shield implicated Dahlan and Abu Shabak in supporting terrorist activities:

- ◆ During the second intifada the preventive security forces in Gaza helped the terrorist organizations and terrorist operatives against Israel. They established and funded extensive facilities for manufacturing weapons, which they made available to both the terrorist organizations and the Palestinian security forces.
- ◆ A document found at the preventive security compound in Gaza revealed that Yasser Arafat, at Dahlan's recommendation, approved legal fees for the son of an Israeli Arab from the Nazareth area accused of stealing weapons from an IDF base. Arafat authorized \$5,000 from the Palestinian ministry of finance for the lawyer during the first year of the intifada, an example of Arafat and Dahlan's involvement in Israeli Arab affairs.



The document signed by Arafat and Dahlan<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On November 20, 2000, a school bus was attacked in Gush Katif. Two residents of Kfar Darom were killed and several children were injured, some of them seriously.

<sup>6</sup> Hebrew only: "מסמך שלל במל"מ: ערפאת ודחלאן סייעו לערביי ישראל שגבנו גנבו נשק מצה"ל", מבט מל"מ, יוני 2003, עמ' 27

►Further investigations and documents captured during Operation Defensive Shield revealed that besides doing their jobs, Dahlan and Abu Shabak pursued additional income sources beyond their official budgets, engaging in extensive economic activities that sometimes bordered on corruption and criminality.

►According to claims, the Gaza-based al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades – al-Amoudi Battalion operated under Dahlan's sponsorship. It cooperated with the military wings of Hamas and the PIJ and participated in a joint operations room in Gaza commanded by Hamas. The organization claimed responsibility for several attacks against Israel, including rocket launches at Israeli communities during Operation Breaking Dawn (August 7–9, 2022).



**An al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades – al-Amoudi Battalion terrorist operative prepares to fire a rocket at an Israeli target (YouTube, November 19, 2019)**

►The Amoudi Battalion also encouraged attacks in Judea and Samaria: in a video, its commander Abu Ahmad called for confrontations with Israel ("the occupation and its settlers") wherever they were found. The video then showed two masked terrorist operatives standing on an Israeli flag. One of them read a statement identifying them as members of the network in Judea and Samaria, saying, "We will work tirelessly to carry out the tasks assigned to us as soon as possible. Our message to our people in Gaza is that we are one body, and the Israeli occupation will pay the price for its crimes against our Palestinian people. An artillery shell in return for an artillery shell, fear in return for fear" January 8, 2020; Dunia al-Watan, January 8, 2020).



**Right: The announcement (al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades – al-Amoudi Battalion website, March 22, 2022). Center: al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades terrorist operatives in Judea and Samaria. Left: Abu Muhammad gives a speech in the Gaza Strip (Abu Muhammad's X account, January 8, 2020)**

► During the return marches in Gaza, on his Facebook page Dahlan condemned the killing of three children in Gaza. He criticized national and Islamic forces in Gaza for failing to prevent children from approaching dangerous areas near the border fence (Muhammad Dahlan's Facebook page, October 29, 2018).



**Muhammad Dahlan tells the national Islamic forces in the Gaza Strip that they have a responsible to prevent children from approaching dangerous areas near the border fence (Muhammad Dahlan's Facebook page, October 29, 2018)**

► Dahlan also related to:

- ◆ Strengthening national unity after Israel's disengagement from Gaza to achieve broader goals, including "liberating Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and forcefully take the refugees' right of return" (Palestinian News Agency, November 6, 2005).
- ◆ While serving as a member of the Fatah Central Committee, he stated that if the United States vetoed the Palestinian Authority's appeal to the Security Council, the Palestinians would have the option to launch a "large-scale popular resistance" against the [border security] fence and settlements. He added that the Palestinians had the right, under international law, to employ all forms of "resistance" approved by their governing institutions (Palestinian News Agency, November 15, 2009).

- ◆ He said the Palestinians had a full arsenal of response options to Israel's insistence on not promoting serious peace negotiations. He called for a discussion within Fatah to establish a unified stance on the nature of "resistance" and its objectives al-Hayat al-Jadeeda, al-Quds, al-Ayyam, December 9, 2009).

## Relations with Fatah

- ▶ Muhammad Dahlan was regarded as a controversial figure by Fatah activists. While head of the preventive security forces, he clashed with senior figures in the security apparatus, including Jibril Rajoub. Over the years, Dahlan criticized PA chairman Yasser Arafat, accusing him of failing to build a proper PA and appointing corrupt individuals close to him.
- ▶ Tensions between Arafat and Dahlan peaked in 2004 when Arafat appointed his nephew, Musa Arafat, as Gaza's police chief, seen as an attempt to weaken Dahlan's influence in the Strip. The appointment led to protests and the kidnapping of Arafat's associates, demanding the decision be reversed.
- ▶ According to reports, in November 2010, Dahlan worked with senior Fatah figures to oust Mahmoud Abbas. Allegedly, Dahlan and his associates sent a letter to representatives of the American administration claiming Abbas was unfit for leadership. It was also reported that Dahlan attempted to establish an armed force in Judea and Samaria under his authority which he could use to stage a coup against Abbas. In response, Abbas formed an investigative committee, and the Fatah Central Committee suspended Dahlan's membership and removed him from his role as a spokesman pending an investigation. Shortly after, Dahlan went to Ramallah, where he was questioned by the committee.
- ▶ In June 2011, the Fatah Central Committee announced Dahlan's expulsion from the movement and severed ties with him. He relocated to the UAE with his family. In 2014, a Palestinian court sentenced Dahlan in absentia to two years in prison for defamation. In December 2016, he was convicted in absentia of embezzling \$16 million and sentenced to three years in prison.
- ▶ The rift between Dahlan and Fatah was so severe that in 2017, an anonymous "source in Abbas' office" stated that the PA intended to submit a wanted list to Interpol, with Dahlan and two associates at the top. The source added that one reason the PA wanted to join Interpol was to pursue individuals convicted by Palestinian courts who fled to foreign countries (Middle East Eye, September 29, 2017).

## Relations with Hamas

- ▶When Hamas began firing rockets at Israel in 2001, Dahlan was critical, describing them as "foolish acts rather than genuine resistance." He argued that each crater left by a rocket in Israel cost Gaza 500 destroyed homes and stated that there were far better alternatives (al-Quds al-Arabi, July 31, 2004).
- ▶In March 2007, Abbas appointed Dahlan to head the National Security Council, a move perceived as aimed against Hamas. Following Hamas' 2007 takeover of Gaza, Hamas regarded him as a senior Fatah figures leading the struggle against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.
- ▶For years, Muhammad Dahlan was regarded with suspicion by Hamas and was accused of leading the "subversive faction" within Fatah, conspiring with the Americans, sabotaging the prisoner exchange deal with Israel, and engaging in activities aimed at inciting a civil war. He was also blamed for security chaos (PalMedia website, December 22, 2007). In addition, he was accused of corruption and using his personal wealth to establish "armed gangs" loyal to him. The spokesman for the Popular Resistance Committees, Abu Abir, explicitly stated that his organization intended to establish a joint operations room to "slaughter Muhammad Dahlan" (Radio Al-Aqsa, January 20, 2007). At the same time, Hamas held him responsible for an attempt to kill Isma'il Haniyeh at the Rafah Crossing (Ma'an, December 15, 2007).
- ▶Dahlan denied the accusations, labeling Hamas a "fascist organization that kills without mercy" (al-Arabi TV, December 17, 2007). Reports of attempts to kill Dahlan included an explosive device neutralized by Palestinian security forces near Khan Yunis and gunfire at his convoy in Jenin and his home in Saraya in Gaza.



**Hamas media and propaganda delegitimizing Muhammad Dahlan. Right: A collection of defamatory articles about Muhammad Dahlan published on Hamas' website under the title "Black Files." Left: Cartoon of Dahlan as an American pop singer singing tunes of civil war (Hamas-affiliated Palestine Mubasher website, January 14, 2008)**

- ▶Dahlan's expulsion from Fatah led him to foster relations with Hamas after Mahmoud Abbas became a common enemy. As a result, Hamas allowed Dahlan's new political faction, the

Democratic Reformist Stream, to operate in Gaza. Dahlan's longstanding connections with Yahya al-Sinwar, Hamas's political bureau chief in Gaza (since 2017) and later head of Hamas's political bureau until his death in October 2024, as well as with Muhammad Deif, head of Hamas's military wing until his death in July 2024, facilitated his rapprochement with the group and made it easy to forget the past.

►Beyond political motives, the rapprochement between Dahlan and al-Sinwar was based on shared cultural elements. In an interview with the AP in July 2017, Dahlan spoke about his "good chemistry" with al-Sinwar, noting that they share a common history as both grew up in Khan Yunis during the same years. Al-Sinwar stated in August 2017 that the relationship with Dahlan was ongoing and had not been severed. He added that Hamas was aware that Dahlan profited from his aid to Gaza, remarking that it was his right and that Hamas did not object to it ("Muhammad Dahlan and the Future of Gaza," Misgav Institute, January 21, 2024).

►Brokered by Egypt, in Cairo in 2017, Dahlan and al-Sinwar signed a series of agreements for political and economic cooperation. Al-Sinwar agreed to several proposals, the most significant of which included the establishment of an advisory council composed of intellectuals and public figures outside the movement to closely hear their views and complement the role of research institutions within Hamas, ensuring broader participation. He also supported the creation of a committee to serve as an incubator for young Palestinian talent and the establishment of a National Media Council. He emphasized that Hamas supported and embraced the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades affiliated with Fatah, including the al-Amoudi Battalion, which was considered linked to Muhammad Dahlan (Facebook page of Hassam al-Dajani, August 16, 2017). None of the decisions were ultimately implemented due to opposition from the PA and the renewal of reconciliation talks between it and Hamas (Yoni Ben Menachem, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, August 18, 2020).

►In an article by Faiz Abu Shamala (a Hamas-affiliated journalist from Khan Yunis), he noted that during a meeting lasting over four hours, al-Sinwar reiterated discussions about "resistance" and its capabilities. Al-Sinwar also stated that they never considered using Dahlan merely to navigate that phase but seriously viewed him as a partner. Therefore, they did not oppose the existence of armed groups affiliated with Muhammad Dahlan in the Gaza Strip, as their goal was "fighting the Zionist occupiers" (Palestine Online, August 16, 201\*).

►In February 2023, "knowledgeable Palestinian sources" reported a meeting in Cairo between a Hamas delegation and a delegation led by Dahlan, discussing Gaza's situation and recent

Israeli escalations. However, Dahlan's spokesperson declined to confirm whether his visit to Cairo was related to Hamas's delegation (al-Sharq al-Awsat, February 12, 2024).

## Activity while in exile

- ▶ During his time in Abu Dhabi, Muhammad Dahlan established himself as a successful businessman and became an advisor on international missions for Muhammad bin Zayed, then the crown prince of Abu Dhabi and now the UAE President. Bin Zayed began dispatching Dahlan on sensitive missions in Arab countries, the Balkans and East Africa. Through those efforts, as well as his financial resources, Dahlan cultivated close ties with Arab leaders, most notably Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.
- ▶ In the meantime, Dahlan forged political alliances with various power brokers within the PA. It was claimed that he utilized his wealth to establish strongholds in PA-controlled territories through supporters, some of whom were armed. It was allegedly part of a strategy to pave the way for his eventual return. "Sources," citing "American officials," reported that according to a trilateral agreement between the United States, the UAE and Israel, Muhammad Dahlan could return to the Palestinian territories as a key figure capable of revitalizing the peace process and playing a significant role in the next stage (Dar al-Hayat, August 13, 2020).
- ▶ Over the years, Dahlan channeled substantial funds into projects in the Gaza Strip, coordinated with Hamas, strengthening his ties with the organization and raising his social and political standing among Gaza residents. For example, he facilitated the delivery of vaccines to Gaza during the COVID-19- pandemic: on February 21, 2021, Gaza's ministry of health received a shipment of 20,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine from the UAE, thanks to Dahlan's involvement (Hassan Aslih's X account, February 21, 2021).
- ▶ In July 2021, the Gaza civil defense directorate received a fire truck donated by the UAE, which entered Gaza through the Rafah Crossing with the assistance and coordination of Muhammad Dahlan (ministry of the interior Facebook page, July 19, 2021).



**Delivering the fire truck (ministry of the interior Facebook page, July 19, 2021)**

## Appendix 2: Statements by Dahlan

### Statements about the Gaza Strip War

► Since the start of the war in Gaza, Muhammad Dahlan has frequently spoken about IDF operations in the Strip and the "day after" through social media and interviews:

- ◆ "The Israeli government vents its hatred on Gaza's residents, killing children and women, assuming that spilling Palestinian blood is the way to evade responsibility." "The Palestinian people are not a dying people but a rising and victorious one" (Muhammad Dahlan's X account, October 30, 2023).

- ◆ He accused that the "brutal massacres" at the al-Fakhoura and Tel al-Zaatar schools in northern Gaza on November 18, 2023, where Palestinians claimed over 200 people were killed in Israeli strikes, could only have been deliberate and part of a premeditated, systematic "genocide." He added, "Hundreds of martyrs and wounded among the displaced were targeted by heavy Israeli bombs inside the schools for the displaced, in locations that Israel and its defense minister claimed had been under their control for ten days. These revenge attacks against schools are repeated criminal scenes of killing and destruction of hospitals. Whenever the enemy fails to achieve its military objectives, it vents its anger on civilians, children, and women. And every time it suffers losses among its invading soldiers, it kills more and more defenseless people" (Muhammad Dahlan's Facebook page, November 18, 2024).

- ◆ Interviewed by The Times, he held the United States administration responsible for "genocide" in Gaza, stating, "What was happening in Gaza was organized ethnic cleansing... erasing Gaza from the map, killing the maximum number of children, women, and elders, and making Gaza uninhabitable" (YouTube, November 22, 2024).

- ◆ Dahlan said that after the war Gaza could not be governed without Hamas consent, as the organization would remain a political force. He suggested establishing a technocratic government to manage Gaza, Judea and Samaria for two years, followed by parliamentary elections, including Hamas (The Economist, October 30, 2024).

- ◆ "Time after time, scenarios about the arrangements for the day after the destructive war initiated and perpetuated by the Israeli occupation are presented or leaked to the media. Sometimes, our name is used to stir up excitement. Therefore, once again, my colleagues and I personally emphasize that we are here solely to do everything in our power to provide aid for our people in Gaza, based on the generous and ongoing support



of our brothers in the United Arab Emirates during this heinous genocide. We strongly emphasize that stopping the war is our top priority. We will support no option other than Palestinian national understandings that lead us to rebuild the Palestinian political system through a transparent democratic process and to provide a documented and scheduled international action plan that encapsulates our people's struggles by establishing an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. I have repeatedly declared my refusal to accept or undertake any security, governmental or executive role" (Muhammad Dahlan's Facebook page, July 25, 2024).

- ◆ He stated that he did not want to assume the role of the future leader of a renewed PA. Regarding the possibility of Hamas' playing a political role in the Palestinian arena even after its October 7 attack, Dahlan said that no force could completely eliminate Hamas because Hamas was an idea. He added that he did not necessarily foresee the participation of Hamas or representatives of other organizations in the government, but rather a technocratic government. He also noted that during the transitional phase, support and participation from all factions would be necessary to stabilize the internal situation and hold general elections (Politico, February 9, 2024).

- ◆ In his opinion, Israel and Hamas would be forced to hand over the administration of the Gaza Strip to an independent Palestinian leader capable of rebuilding the region. He stated that he was trying to persuade Hamas to transfer responsibility for managing the Strip to him and mentioned that he had recently met with several senior members of the movement to discuss the matter (The New York Times, February 14, 2024).

## Other statements

- ◆ **On Ismail Haniyeh's death:** He offered his condolences to the Palestinian people on the death of Isma'il Haniyeh, head of Hamas' political bureau, and condemned the "cowardly assassination," stating that it would not have occurred without the green light given by the United States to continue the "crimes of the occupation against the Palestinian people and its leaders." He called for strengthening national unity to confront plans to eliminate the Palestinian cause and attempts to impose new realities on the ground. Finally, he urged the international community to take responsibility and act to stop Israel's crimes in Gaza (Muhammad Dahlan's Facebook page, July 31, 2024).

- ◆ **On Yahya al-Sinwar's appointment as head of the Hamas political bureau:** Dahlan's Democratic Reformist Stream congratulated "the brothers in the Islamic

Resistance Movement Hamas" on the success of their internal democratic process and the election of "the resistance brother" Yahya Al-Sinwar as the movement's leader. The Stream praised the speed with which the movement's leadership filled the significant void left by the death of Isma'il Haniyeh. It also noted that the success of the democratic process highlighted the failure of Israel's "assassination policy" aimed at eliminating "resistance" movements and further proved that such a policy would never bring security to the "occupying" state (Democratic Reformist Stream website, August 6, 2024).

◆ **On Yahya al-Sinwar's death:** Dahlan's Democratic Reformist Stream stated that "the shaheed commander Yahya al-Sinwar was an example of a Palestinian fighter who fought in his campaigns for the freedom of his homeland and the dignity of his people" (Democratic Reformist Stream website, October 18, 2024).

◆ **Following the announcement by European countries recognizing a Palestinian state:** He said it represented "historical justice" and a vital step towards freedom and the end of Israeli occupation (Petra News Agency, May 22, 2024).

◆ **Regarding the Palestinian leadership:** He stated that the new Palestinian leadership should be led by a group elected democratically to represent the Palestinian people. Referring to the involvement of the "resistance axis"<sup>7</sup> in the conflict, Dahlan argued that Iran and Hezbollah act primarily in their own interests (al-Mashhad, January 3, 2024).

◆ **Regarding the formation of a new PA government:** Dahlan's Democratic Reformist Stream criticized Mahmoud Abbas' decision to establish a new government. It argued that the step did not meet the requirements for the post-war stage and would further erode Palestinian trust in the PA, adding that the decision bypassed Palestinian demands for institutional reform and the establishment of a government free from Abbas' influence. The Stream called for the creation of a broad internal front to support a temporary, independent, and professional government focused on halting "aggression" and rebuilding Gaza, while setting a sure and certain date for comprehensive elections (Reformist Stream website, March 16, 2024\*).

◆ **Regarding the internal situation in Israel and the two-state solution:** Dahlan stated that the two-state solution was over and done with because Israel had destroyed

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<sup>7</sup> Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, the Palestinian organizations, the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen and the pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

it. He urged the Palestinian leadership to propose a one-state solution and let Israel reject it. Regarding Israel's internal situation, he said that Israel, once proud of being a true democracy, no longer was, and now seeks to become a dictatorship. He sarcastically wished Prime Minister Netanyahu success in his plan to dismantle the Israeli judicial system. On Palestinian internal matters, he said Abbas should declare the unity of Judea and Samaria and Gaza Strip and hold presidential and parliamentary elections, but he had no desire to do so. Regarding security escalation, Dahlan remarked that the Palestinian people were "resisting the occupation," pointing out individual acts of "resistance," which he believed would eventually evolve into mass initiatives (Sky News, March 1, 2023).