

# Disarm, recognise Israel to join unity Govt: US to Hamas

Jerusalem

**A** top aide to US President Donald Trump said yesterday that an emerging Palestinian unity government must recognise Israel and disarm Hamas, following a landmark reconciliation deal signed last week, the BBC reported yesterday.

"Any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognise the state of Israel, accept previous agreements and obligations between the parties -- including to disarm terrorists -- and commit to peaceful negotiations," Jason Greenblatt, Trump's special representative for international negotiations, said in a statement.

"If Hamas is to play any role in a Palestinian government, it must accept these basic requirements," he added in the first detailed US response to last week's Palestinian unity deal.



Hamas members in Gaza (File photo)

The statement from Greenblatt was similar to the Israeli government's response this week in which it vowed not to

negotiate with a Palestinian unity government that includes Hamas unless the Islamist group agrees to a list of demands.

The demands included recognising Israel and renouncing violence.

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement signed a reconciliation deal with Hamas in Cairo a week ago aimed at ending a bitter 10-year split.

The Mahmoud Abbas-led Palestine Liberation Organisation has recognised the Israeli state, but Hamas has not and is blacklisted as a terrorist organisation by the United States and the European Union.

Israel and Hamas have fought three wars since 2008, and the Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade for more than a decade.

Egypt has also kept its border with Gaza largely closed in recent years. Hamas has run the Gaza Strip since seizing it in a near civil war with Fatah in 2007 following a dispute over elections won by the Islamist movement.

## Hamas slams US

Jerusalem

**P**alestinian movement Hamas accused the United States of "blatant interference" in Palestinian affairs yesterday after US President Donald Trump's envoy demanded they disarm and recognize Israel in any unity government.

"This is blatant interference in Palestinian affairs because it is the right of our people to choose its government according to their supreme strategic interests," senior Hamas official Bassem Naim told French Press Agency.

He accused Jason Greenblatt, Trump's special representative for international negotiations, of bowing to pressure from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government.

"This statement comes under pressure from the extreme right-wing Netanyahu government and is in line with the Netanyahu statement from two days ago," Naim said.

## Saudi scholars to vet teaching of Prophet to curb extremism

Riyadh

**S**audi authorities have taken an "unprecedented" step to tackle Islamic extremism by setting up a council of scholars to vet religious teachings around the world, *The Guardian* reported yesterday.

A royal order issued this week by King Salman established a global body of elite scholars based in the holy city of Medina to root out and "eliminate fake and extremist texts".

The King Salman Complex will become a "trusted source of the correct and authenticate [sic] hadith", said an announcement from the Saudi ministry of culture and information. It described the move as an "unprecedented initiative".

Hadith are sayings, actions and pronouncements of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that are additional and complementary to the Qur'an, and a source of guidance for Muslims.

The scholars would study hadith "with the purpose of eliminating fake and extremist texts and any texts that contradict the teachings of Islam and justify the committing of crimes, murders and terrorist acts which have no place in Islam, the religion



King Salman bin Abdulaziz

of peace," said the ministry's announcement.

Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud has appointed Sheikh Mohammed bin Hassan al-Sheikh, a member of the senior scholars council, as chairman of the complex's scientific council. Members are to be appointed by royal decree.

The Saudi authorities have been worried about extremism,

both as a domestic threat and as a strain on its relations with the west, since 9/11, said Jane Kinninmont, a senior research fellow at Chatham House.

"They would say the accusations are out of date, but they know this issue is their achilles heel. The new leadership in Saudi cares much more about its image and PR than before and is genuinely trying to get to grips with extremism," she said.

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