

Egypt makes new proposal on Hamas-Fatah pact

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Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman

Egypt on Saturday made a new proposal to Hamas after it requested a delay in the signing of a reconciliation pact with rival Palestinian movement Fatah.

A Hamas delegation met Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman in a bid set a new date for the signing of a Palestinian unity deal.

According to the DPA news agency, Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said that "Egypt handed Hamas delegation the new proposal that overcomes the dispute over the scheduled date for signing the reconciliation deal."

He added that "Hamas would give Egypt its answer soon after studying the proposal."

On Wednesday, Hamas asked Egypt, which mediates talks between the two factions, to postpone the earlier announced date of October 26.

In early September, Cairo put forward a new document to reconcile the two largest Palestinian factions, which split in June 2007 when Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip and pushed the Fatah movement out of the enclave. The six previous rounds of reconciliation talks failed.

The document envisions general elections to be held in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in the first half of 2010, a reform of Palestinian security services under the Egyptian control and the release of political prisoners by both factions.

Armed clashes between Fatah and Hamas came some 18 months after Hamas had won Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006. Fatah has renounced violence, while Hamas refuses to recognize Israel and reserves the right to use violence in its struggle to create a Palestinian state.

Reconciliation talks resumed after Israel's assault on Gaza at the turn of the year, which saw some 1,300 Palestinians killed and 5,000 injured.

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