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Hamas in talks as Palestinian unity momentum builds



Leaders of Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas met in Qatar on Friday amid renewed impetus for a unity government after the resignation of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, a Palestinian official told AFP. Newly re-elected Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal chaired the meeting in his base in exile in Qatar, which was also attended by Hamas leaders from Gaza including its Prime Minister Ismail Haniya. Momentum has built for reconciliation between Hamas and the Fatah movement of president Mahmud Abbas since the resignation of Fayyad, a U.S.-trained economist whose appointment as premier was never recognized by the Islamists. "The meeting began on Thursday and will continue until Saturday," the official said, requesting anonymity. Hamas leaders will discuss "Palestinian reconciliation, developments in the Palestinian arena following Fayyad's resignation, as well as ways of pressing Israel to release Palestinian prisoners," the official said. The Islamists never recognized Fayyad's appointment to replace Haniya after their seizure of Gaza in bloody street battles in 2007 that effectively divided the Palestinian territories in two, with Abbas's writ confined to the West Bank. Friday's talks in Doha came after Abbas pledged at a meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organization late on Thursday to step up efforts for a unity government. Fatah and Hamas signed an agreement in Cairo in 2011, pledging to set up a caretaker government of independents to pave the way for parliamentary and presidential elections within 12 months, but its implementation stalled over the government's make-up.