

Point of View

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Is the Saudi Initiative good enough?

Palestinian Foreign Minister, Mahmoud Zahar said the Government of the PA will discuss whether to accept the Saudi Initiative (Arab Peace Initiative) following the request of the Arab League secretary (Nahamias, **Ynet**, 4/15/06).

The Re'ut Institute poses the question: Will Israel be satisfied by an acceptance of the Saudi Initiative *or* will it continue to demand that Hamas formally recognize Israel?

What is the Issue?

- The Saudi Initiative was adopted at the Arab Summit in Beirut (March 28, 2002). The initiative called on Arab states to “normalize relations” with Israel in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian state within June 4, 1967 borders and a just solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees in accordance with UN Resolution 194.
- The initiative was welcomed by UN Security Council Resolution 1397 and was mentioned within the framework of the third phase of the Roadmap.
- Israel rejected the initiative (3/02). Moreover, among its fourteen reservations to the Roadmap, Israel demanded to remove any reference other than 242 and 338 (i.e. UN Resolution 1397 and the Saudi Initiative).
- On several occasions since the Palestinian elections (1/06), Foreign Minister Zahar and senior Hamas leader Khaled Mashal have stated that Hamas might accept the initiative. (**A-shark Al-awsat**, 2/8; **Ha'aretz**, 2/13; **Ynet**, 4/15).

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- Full acceptance of Israeli and American demands, i.e. formally recognizing Israel's right to exist, ratifying existing agreements and ending violence, would constitute an ideological surrender by Hamas.
- The existence of an international coalition applying pressure on the Hamas **government**, leaves the Hamas **movement** with two choices:
 - **To give up on governing but not on ideology** – if it is unable to address the needs of the population in the West Bank and Gaza. (Mashal: “If Hamas is not defending the Palestinian people – the PA can go to hell”, **Ha'aretz**, 3/17);
 - **To adapt its ideology** – Accepting the Saudi Initiative would theoretically be an ideological compromise. However, such an acceptance would allow Hamas:
 - **To evade explicitly recognizing Israel** as demanded from Hamas. Though the initiative requires the Arab states and Israel to normalize relations but **does not explicitly refer to the Palestinians**;
 - **To break up the international coalition** – Due to the international status of the initiative, recognition of it is likely to weaken the economic and political isolation of the PA government;
 - **To return the ball to Israel's court** – Israel may be forced to re-examine its rejection of the initiative.

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Policy Options

Were the PA government to recognize the Saudi Initiative, Israel would face the following alternatives:

- **Reject the Hamas government's recognition of the initiative** and continue to demand an explicit recognition of Israel. However, the continuing pressure on the PA may lead to the fall of the Hamas government *or* the collapse of the PA in its entirety.
- **Accept Hamas' recognition of the initiative as a basis to continue the political process:**
 - Such an action is likely to create a political "address" within the PA at least on issues requiring cooperation such as security coordination;
 - Allow Israel to maintain the international coalition against Hamas;
 - However, this alternative would ostensibly legitimize a regime that negates Israel's right to exist.

For additional sources see the Re'ut Institute website: www.reut-institute.org and the Re'ut Institute website on the subject of the **Israel's challenge in dealing with Hamas** <http://www.reut2006.info/hamas/eng/> -

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