

Point of View

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Does Israel really want to bring down Hamas?

Israel and the international community deemed the inauguration of the government of the Palestinian Authority (PA) a watershed moment. Until now, they have withheld from throwing their full weight into forcing Hamas to recognize Israel, ratify existing agreements and abandoning the armed struggle (hereinafter, "the three demands").

The question now is whether Israel really wants Hamas to accept these demands.

What is the Issue?

- Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist, rejects the Oslo agreements, remains committed to the armed struggle and maintains independent terror infrastructures.
- Following the Hamas' victory (1/06), Israel and the international community presented Hamas / the PA with three demands: to recognize Israel, to ratify existing agreements and to dismantle terror infrastructures.
- In order to force Hamas / the PA to accept these demands, Israel stopped transferring taxes and customs that it collects on behalf of the Palestinians in accordance with the Interim Agreement (around 30% of the PA budget). In addition, Israel is attempting to create an international coalition which would freeze financial support of the PA until these demands are met.
- So far, Israel has refused to accept implicit consent to the three demands by Hamas, and continued to call for explicit statements.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- A cessation of terror and the existence of an effective PA are vital for any political development, whether the "Convergence Plan", negotiations on an interim arrangement or permanent status agreement. At present, it appears that Hamas will succeed in establishing a stable government and that its electoral victory has limited its readiness to conduct terror attacks against Israel.
- An immediate and explicit consent by Hamas to Israel's demands would be viewed as an ideological surrender. This, in turn, could lead to a split within Hamas, and a renewal of terror attacks by the new separatist group (the armed wing), which would undermine the stability of the PA.
- Israel is expending significant political resources in its attempt to form an international coalition against Hamas with the goal of making Hamas surrender or lose its authority.

Policy Options

Israel should decide whether it wants to bring Hamas down or to change its ideology –

- **Don't give Hamas an opportunity** – Placing effective pressure on Hamas leading to surrender (immediate concession and acceptance of the Israeli demands) or to resign from power, could bring a renewal of terror attacks and destabilize the PA (see above). Moreover, it is not clear whether Fatah would constitute a better alternative.
- **Give Hamas the opportunity to fail on its own** – This alternative would require Israel to withdraw its three demands and partially consent to Hamas' positions regarding existing agreements (such as the dismantling of the customs envelope and an independent

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economy). Such policy may increase the probability of Hamas' failure, while reducing the chances for it deflecting the blame onto Israel. Such circumstances may strengthen the moderate forces in the PA.

- **Give Hamas the opportunity to succeed** – If Hamas establishes a stable government and ceases to carry-out terror attacks, Israel could view it as an “address” and strengthen it by transferring powers and authorities prior to future negotiations or the “Convergence Plan.” In such case, Israel should not place high pressure on the PA / Hamas until the intentions of the new government become clear.

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

On the issue of Hamas, see: “[Is the PA about to be Dismantled?](#)” (3/22/06); “[Palestinian Elections – Towards Institutional Dysfunction](#)” (12/12/05); “[Is there an International Coalition against Hamas?](#)” (3/21/06); “[The PA Under Hamas – From Partner to Address](#)” (3/7/06); “[A Palestinian Army – Now or Later?](#)” (2/2/06); “[Hamas and the PLO – Hostile Takeover of a Shell Company](#)” (1/8/06); “[Can Hamas Continue to Enjoy Both Worlds?](#)” (5/24/06).

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