

Point of View

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Is Hamas Preparing the Ground for a Compromise?

The Hamas movement announced that PA ministers would cease their activities within the Hamas movement (Regular, **Ha'aretz**, 4/7/06). Government representatives requested that the new government be referred to as the “PA Government” and not the “Hamas Government” (Rubinstein, **Ha'aretz**, 4/10/06).

The Re'ut Institute contends that these declarations could be the first stage in a strategy designed to break off the international coalition against Hamas.

What is the Issue?

- Israel and the international community presented the Palestinians with three demands: to recognize Israel, to reaffirm existing agreements and to end violence.
- The international coalition, created to pressure Hamas to accept these demands, has significantly decreased economic assistance to the PA.
- However, these actions could severely obstruct Palestinian economic activity and result in a humanitarian crisis or the dismantling of the PA.
- Moreover, should Hamas accept the demands or cede control over the PA, the PA's ability to govern may be substantially damaged.
- The worse the economic situation in the PA becomes, the less stable the international coalition will be. There are already signs that it is beginning to unravel: see actions by Russia, France, China and India.
- Therefore, if Israel does not want to be held responsible for a humanitarian crisis or face the collapse of the PA, it needs to seek a way out from the maze.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- Members of the Quartet, that lead the international coalition, have no consistent mindset regarding the entity subject to the demands:
 - The US directs the demands to “**Hamas**”, while imposing sanctions on the PA, due to Hamas’ control over the government (for the Congressional legislation proposing a freeze on financial assistance to the PA see the [AIPAC website](#));
 - The EU is directing its demands towards the “**PA government**”, i.e. the EU would repeal its sanctions if the government accepts the aforementioned demands (See [Council of European Union](#), 4/10/06).
 - The UN and Russia called on the international community not to freeze aid to the PA (See **Al-Hayat Al-Jadida** 3/1/06; **Al-Hayat**, 2/9/06).
- Even **Israel** is not presenting a consistent position (see [Foreign Ministry press release](#), 3/22/06), and refers to “Hamas” and the “Hamas government” alternately.
- In this context it appears that the distinction made by Hamas between the government and the movement could be the first step towards meeting the conditions set by the EU.
- Such move could trigger the renewal of European aid and further fragment the international coalition.

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Policy Options

- Does Israel want “to go the distance with Hamas”? – If so, Israel must insist that the Hamas **movement** (and not the government) explicitly comply with the three demands.
On the one hand, achieving this objective will likely necessitate a harsh economic crisis within the PA and a political crisis which might eventually lead to the collapse of the PA. *On the other hand*, the economic crisis may undermine the unity of the int. coalition.
- Is Israel ready for a compromise with Hamas? – i.e. Hamas government will explicitly or implicitly accept the three demands, whereas the Hamas movement will remain committed to its fundamentalist ideology.
Such scenario would likely prevent a humanitarian crisis in the PA, but would make Israel directly deal with people like Mahmoud Al-Zahar.

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: “[Who is Required to Recognize Israel](#)” (4/2/06); “[Blocking Transfer of Funds is Ineffective Against the Hamas PA](#)” (March 2006); “[Does Israel Really want to Bring Hamas Down?](#)” (3/29/06); “[Is the PA about to be Dismantled?](#)” (3/22/06); “[Is there an International Coalition against Hamas?](#)” (3/21/06); “[The PA Under Hamas – From Partner to Address](#)” (3/7/06); “[The Hamas Movement and the Political Process](#)” (in Hebrew, 1/24/06); “[Can Hamas Continue to Enjoy Both Worlds?](#)” (in Hebrew, 5/24/06).

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