

Point of View

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Is the PA about to be dismantle?

Following the IDF operation in Jericho last week, Fatah members called upon Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Abu-Mazen to dismantle the PA (**Ynet**, 3/15/06). Khaled Mash'al declared that Hamas would not hesitate to dismantle the PA if it sees that it cannot protect the Palestinian people (**Ha'aretz**, 3/19/06).

These statements may potentially develop into a trend which is of strategic significance.

What is the Issue?

- Fatah's demand to dismantle the PA may be understood in the context of the **struggle between Fatah and Hamas** for the leadership of the Palestinian national movement:
 - Following the elections, Fatah lost control of the PA, yet still controls the PLO.
 - The PLO's status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people has been eroded in recent years, and the PA has been functioning as a de-facto representative of the residents of Gaza and the West Bank.
 - With Hamas' electoral victory (1/06), Fatah lost an important stronghold.
 - Therefore, dismantling the PA would strengthen the PLO and allow Fatah to resume power.
- **However, Fatah cannot dismantle the PA without Hamas' cooperation:**
 - The Palestinian constitutional structure and the existing agreements **do not provide a mechanism for dismantling the PA.**
 - **Abu-Mazen cannot dismantle the PA on his own.** The most he can do is resign, in which case the Chairman of Parliament (Hamas member, Abdel-Aziz Dweik) will be appointed provisional chairman in accordance with Palestinian Basic Law.
 - Since **Hamas controls both Parliament and Government**, if Abu-Mazen resigns all PA authorities would be controlled by Hamas.
 - Therefore, dismantling the PA will be possible only through cooperation between Hamas and Fatah, in which case Abu-Mazen resigns and the PLC dissolves itself.
- **Currently it seems that Hamas has no interest in dismantling the PA**, both due to its will to establish control over the PA and fulfill its promises to the voters; and since it does not want to strengthen the PLO in which it has no influence.
- However, should Hamas decide that it is no longer worthwhile to maintain control over the PA, it is not unlikely that it would cooperate with Fatah to dismantle it.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- So far, the political process was based on the notion that the PA is the corner stone for the future Palestinian state, and would gradually obtain its authorities through agreements with Israel.
- The dismantling of the PA may undermine basic elements of the Israeli mindset:
 - **Administrative responsibility for residents of the West Bank would be placed upon Israel** if it maintains control over the West Bank's external perimeter (as opposed to the situation in Gaza).

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- An Israeli attempt to avoid responsibility for the West Bank may bring about the **entry of international forces on "uncomfortable terms"**, limiting Israel's political and military flexibility.
- Israel may be required to **withdraw from the external perimeter of the West Bank** and allow direct access to Jordan in order to end its responsibility for Palestinians in the West Bank.
- **Unilateral initiatives to end control over the Palestinians may be thwarted**, as any unilateral disengagement requires an effective political address that would fill the vacuum created by Israel's withdrawal.
- Moreover, dismantling the PA may **undermine the consensus regarding the two-state solution**, and strengthen attempts to establish one bi-national state on the territory of Israel and the PA.

Policy Options

- Thus far, only a few statements have been made on dismantling the PA.
- The chances for these statements to evolve into a trend depend on:
 - **Political and economic pressure on Hamas** – Making tougher political demands and increasing the economic pressure on Hamas (e.g. by blocking the transfer of goods to and from the PA) may create a disincentive for it to maintain the PA. In addition, if the economic situation of the PA deteriorates, the international legitimization for its dismantling would increase.
 - **Institution-building in the PA** – The stronger the effective control of the PA is, the harder it would be for Palestinians to justify its dismantling.
 - **Issue of Palestinian representation** – Establishing the PA's status as a legitimate representative of Gaza and the West Bank will increase its stability. However, if Israel and the international community consider the PLO to be the **sole** legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, Hamas would be less interested in maintaining the PA.

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

For further information on this issue, see: "[Towards Institutional Dysfunction](#)" (12/12/05); "Is there an International Coalition against Hamas?" (3/20/06); "[The PA under Hamas – from Partner to "Address"?](#)" (3/7/06); "[Hamas Movement following the Elections](#)" (2/23/06) "[Palestinian Army – Now or Later?](#)" (2/2/06); "[The Hezbollah Precedent](#)" (1/30/06); "[Hamas and the PLO – Hostile Takeover of a Shell Company](#)" (12/1/05); "[How Long will Hamas Continue to Enjoy Both Worlds?](#)" (5/24/05)

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