



Hamas and the PLO – Hostile Takeover of a Shell Company

Mahmoud Al-Zahar, a prominent Hamas leader, stated that Hamas wants to “join the PLO - but on the basis of a new program, not of the Oslo program and the agreements... **right now the PLO is a dead body... we will revive this organization by means of new programs and methods.**” (MEMRI, 14/11/05).

What is the Issue?

The PLO and the PA

- The PLO holds the political asset of being the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” as recognized by the Rabat Summit of Arab leaders (10/74), the international community (11/74), Israel and the US (9/93).
- This status was reaffirmed in the Interim Agreement (9/95), which limited the powers of the PA and stipulated that it would be represented by the PLO.
- *However*, since the beginning of the Oslo Process, the majority of the leaders of the PLO have returned to the PA. Since then, the status of the PLO within the Palestinian political system has been gradually eroded.
- *Nevertheless*, the distinction between the PLO and the PA remains significant at symbolic, constitutional, political and practical levels (See Point of View #6: “[Who is Coming to the United States: the Chair of the PA or the PLO?](#)”).
- **The PLO has thus turned into a “political shell company”**, which means that:
 - *On the one hand*, the PLO officially remains the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
 - *On the other hand*, the responsibility for issues relating to the West Bank and Gaza Strip is in the hands of the PA.

Hamas

- Hamas rejects the secular-nationalism of the PLO and offers an alternative of Islamist-nationalism.
- Statements of Al-Zahar and other Hamas leaders express the organization's **aspirations to take over the Palestinian national movement and to represent the entire Palestinian people**. In other words, Hamas aspires to take Fatah's place as head of the PLO and the PA.
- In the past, Hamas refused to recognize the PA as it was created by a bilateral agreement with Israel. However, Hamas has recently adopted a more practical approach towards both the PLO and the PA:
 - *On the one hand*, Hamas decided to run in the municipal elections and for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) of the PA.
 - On the other hand, Hamas continues to reject Fatah's recognition of Israel as embodied by the Oslo Process.

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Why is this Important? Why Now?

- Hamas' decision to participate in elections for the PLC serves its strategy to take control over the Palestinian national movement.
- Hamas' strategy has been:
 - **Maintaining influence** over the political process through its military-wing and undermining the PA; *while*
 - **Avoiding responsibility** for the failure of the political process and deflecting blame onto Fatah and the PA.
- If these trends persist, Hamas may gain control over the entire Palestinian national movement – both the PA and the PLO.
- If Hamas takes over the PLO, its influence over the entire Palestinian national movement and thus over the political process vis-à-vis Israel may increase. The revival of the PLO and its ideological subjugation to Hamas will radicalize the official Palestinian position and shift its goal towards the establishment of a Palestinian state over the entire territory of Mandatory Palestine.

Policy Options

- Currently, it seems that Hamas' participation in the PLC elections is inevitable.
- The struggle to disarm Hamas *after* the elections will pose a challenge for Israel. Given the structure of the Palestinian constitutional system, Hamas may be able to thwart legislation that is contrary to its interests, including its disarmament.
- However, Israel could undermine the strategy of Hamas by preventing the revival of the PLO by eroding its status as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”
- This can be realized through policy aimed at **turning the PA into the legitimate representative of the residents of the West Bank and Gaza** on the basis of its democratically elected institutions.
- In order to promote this process Israel may proceed with the **Second Phase of the Roadmap**, which calls for the establishment of a Palestinian State with Provisional Borders (PSPB), *before the implementation of the First Phase of the Roadmap*, which calls for disarming Hamas.
- **A comprehensive unilateral strategy aimed at resuming negotiations** – There is a need to develop possible unilateral measures to promote a Two-State Solution without relying on Palestinian consent.

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For additional sources see the Re'ut Institute website: www.reut-institute.org:

- For more information on the subject of Hamas see: "[How Long will the Hamas Continue to Enjoy Both Worlds?](#)" (Hebrew); [Eran Shayshon, "Basic Assumption: Hamas will Participate," "Ha'aretz", 6/10/05](#) (Hebrew); [Omri Dagan, "Israel Should Change Stance on Hamas," "YNET", 22/9/05](#); [Eran Shayshon, "Towards Representing All Palestinians", "Ha'aretz", 26/6/05](#); [Gidi Grinstein, "'Bear Hug' for Hamas" YNET, 8/6/05](#); "[Hamas Movement](#)" (Hebrew Draft); "[Hamas Covenant](#)" (Hebrew Draft).
- For more information on the subject of the Palestinian interlocutor see: "[Who is the Interlocutor – the PLO or the Palestinian Authority](#)"; "[Policy-Options for Switching the PLO with the PA](#)"; "[Issue of Palestinian Representation](#)"; "[Palestinian Constitutional structure](#)"; "[PLO](#)" (Hebrew); "[Palestinian Authority](#)" (Hebrew).

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