

Point of View

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Is There an International Coalition Against Hamas?

The Quartet's Special Envoy to the Middle East, James Wolfensohn, warned that the continuation of economic pressure on the PA may lead to its financial collapse (**Ynet**, 3/17/06). Senior Hamas members predict that the new Hamas government will rely on support from Arab and Islamic states (**Ha'aretz**, 3/19/06).

Thus, the international coalition against Hamas may be weakened due to changes in the balance of powers within the international community.

What is the Issue?

- Throughout the Oslo Process the US was the sole mediator between Israel and the Palestinians: the Oslo Accords were signed under its sponsorship, the "Bush Vision to the Middle East" (6/02) constituted the basis for the Roadmap, and the Disengagement Plan was implemented after an exchange of letters between President Bush and Prime Ministers Sharon and Abu Ala (4/04).
- Following Hamas' electoral victory (1/06), Israel demanded that Hamas recognize Israel, ratify existing agreements and disarm, or face loss of funding for the PA.
- *In principle*, the "Quartet" (US, EU, Russia and the UN) endorsed these conditions (**NRG**, 2/11).
- *In reality*, it becomes apparent that there is a difference of opinions between the US and the other members of the Quartet regarding the amount of economic pressure to apply onto the PA following the formation of a government under the leadership of Hamas (**Ha'aretz**, 2/12/06):
 - The US has declared that it will cease its assistance to the PA with the establishment of a Hamas-led government, while the Quartet has stated that it will "**consider**" the continuation of assistance (**Quartet Statement**, 1/30/06).
 - Despite American and Israeli protests, Russia invited representatives of the **Hamas movement** (not members of the Hamas party in the PA) to visit Moscow and meet the Russian foreign minister (**Ha'aretz**, 3/5/06).
 - The UN called upon donor states to transfer funds to the territories of the PA in order to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Israel and the US dispute the UN's evaluation of the extent of the crisis.
- There currently exists a lack of clarity regarding the essence and the extent of aid to the Palestinians, and especially how to distinguish between humanitarian, budgetary and developmental aid. The fact that a portion of the aid is transferred through international organizations further complicates the situation.

Why is this Important? Why Now?

- Israel is asking Hamas to agree to demands that contradict its **ideological principles**.
- Accordingly, without creating a **coordinated international coalition** this effort is doomed to fail.

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- However, the unique status of the US and its ability to form an effective coalition against Hamas has been decreased following Hamas' victory and other significant regional developments such as:
 - **International actors** such as Russia, France and China, see the American weakness as an opportunity to strengthen their position in the Middle East through direct contacts with Hamas.
 - **Iran** identifies an opportunity to gain an official foothold in the PA through economic aid.
 - **The focus has moved from the political process to the economic-humanitarian sphere**, where the US plays a marginal role as compared to the UN and the EU.
- These trends undermine the ability of Israel and the US to sustain an effective international coalition against Hamas.

Policy Options

- **Israel and the US are entrapped:** The stricter their demands from Hamas are, the weaker the international coalition is. In contrast, flexibility may strengthen the coalition.
- Therefore, in order to confront Hamas with the tension between its ideology and the needs of the Palestinian population, demands on Hamas must be consistent with international legal norms, be legitimate in the eyes of the majority of Palestinians and cause minimum damage to the well-being of the Palestinian population.
- If Israel *does not* want a direct and immediate confrontation with Hamas or international community, it should soften its demands. It is possible that Israel will be forced to deal directly with the PA even if Hamas does not **explicitly** comply with those demands.
- **Movement of goods and not economic aid** – If Israel *does want* a confrontation with Hamas, which would force it to accept its demands or resign from the government:
 - It must reconsider the use of economic aid as leverage due to its aforementioned weaknesses. Israel has full control over the movement of goods to and from the West Bank and can apply effective pressure using this leverage.
 - However, it is important to remember that the Olmert's "Convergence Plan" is based on the assumption that the PA will fill the vacuum created by Israel's departure. Pressures that might cause the PA to collapse undermine this objective.

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

- On the issue of Hamas, see: "[The PA Under Hamas – From Partner to Address](#)" (3/7/06); "[A Palestinian Army – Now or Later?](#)" (2/2/06); "[Hamas and the Political Process](#)" (in Hebrew, 1/24/06); "[Hizbullah Precedent](#)" (1/29/06); "[Hamas and the PLO – Hostile Takeover of a Shell Company](#)" (1/8/06); "[Can Hamas Continue to Enjoy Both Worlds?](#)" (5/24/06).
- On the leadership structure of the Palestinian national movement, see: "[Who should be the interlocutor: the PLO or the Palestinian Authority?](#)" (3/9/05); "[Policy Options for Switching the PLO with the PA as the Palestinian Interlocutor](#)" (3/8/05); "[Palestinian Elections – Towards Institutional Dysfunction](#)" (12/12/05).

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- Also see: Gidi Grinstein, "[Bear Hug for Hamas](#)", **Ynet** (6/8/05); Eran Shayshon, "[Customs against Hamas](#)", **Ma'ariv** (in Hebrew, 1/29/06); Moti Crystal, "[Talking with Hamas: Rules for Negotiations](#)", **Ynet** (in Hebrew, 1/29/06); Yariv Man, "[Like Hizbullah Ministers in Lebanon](#)", **Ha'aretz** (in Hebrew, 1/22/06).

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